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Elsie Darlington

FIRESIDE FAIRIES:

OR

CHRISTMAS AT AUNT ELSIE'S.

BY

SUSAN PINDAR.

NEW-YORK:
D. APPLETON & COMPANY,
200 BROADWAY.
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PREFACE.

"Home truths in strange dresses" would, perhaps, be an appropriate title for this unobtrusive volume, which, it is hoped will meet the approbation of the "little people" for whom it is expressly designed.

There exists, in the minds of some parents, a strong and reasonable prejudice against Fairy Tales for children; as the extravagant imagery and improbable incidents, in which they generally abound, often mislead or bewilder the youthful imagination. But it is hoped this little book may escape such censure.

The mind of a child is easily impressible through the medium of fancy; and this humble attempt to deck familiar, yet important truths, and the home duties of every-day life, in the drapery of fairy land,

may, perhaps, serve to awaken a reasoning thought, leading ultimately to an active principle.

If so, the mission of this little volume is fulfilled. It is too humble to provoke criticism; and only seeks a welcome from those earthly "Fireside Fairies," whose instruction and entertainment have been its highest aim.

CONTENTS.

The Two Voices, or the Shadow and Shadowless . 18
The Minute Fairies 40
I Have and Oh Had I 64
The Hump and the Long Nose 83
The Lily Fairy and the Silver Beam 108
The Wonderful Watch 128
The Red and White Rose Trees 147
The Diamond Fountain 178
The Magical Key 189
Conclusion 200

FIRESIDE FAIRIES.

CHAPTER I.

Yes, they had come at last; the merry Christmas holidays! and little hearts were beating high, and bright eyes growing brighter, in anticipation of enjoyment to come,—of many days free from the wearisome bondage of tasks, and recitations,—a perfect vista of light and happiness.

Christmas Holidays! magical words! the syllables chime together like the tinkle of a merry sleigh-bell, and the very letters seem the types of fun and frolic.

And they had actually arrived;—of that you might have assured yourself, had you peeped into Aunt Elsie's large old-fashioned parlor, and seen the merry group assembled there around the great open fireplace, in which a huge Christmas log (so big that it seemed

miraculous how it was ever carried and deposited there) was blazing, with a steady flame, while the younger and smaller branches went crackling, and shooting up their slender spears of light, and alto gether casting a ruddy glow throughout the room, illuminating the happy faces grouped therein.

Every few moments a chesnut, bursting with impatience from its bed among the embers, would pop out on the broad hearthstone, and then such jumping and scrabbling ensued, with shouts of merry laughter, as was delightful to witness, and which Aunt Elsie seemed heartily to enjoy.

Never was there such a place to spend the holidays as at Aunt Elsie's, nor such a priestess to preside over the festivities as Aunt Elsie herself. She was a widow, and childless, her children having all died in infancy, and her warm love seemed ever overflowing towards all created things; but more especially went it forth to the "little people," as she loved to call the groups of children that clustered about her.

She was aunt to every child for miles around, and never was the tie of relationship stronger than the bond of love that united Aunt Elsie to her protegés. All their tales of troubles were poured into her sympathizing ear, with the certainty of receiving good advice and real assistance. Every project for a frolic

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was confided to her, sure to be encouraged if harmless, or dissuaded from if mischievous or hurtful.

But while all obedient children were favorites, more especially did the orphans or destitute interest her love; and for these she had more substantial benefits in store than the distribution of holiday gifts or other kindnesses shared with the happy and fortunate children of kind parents. Many little friendless ones owed their instruction and the means of honorable support to Aunt Elsie's benevolence; and it was pleasant to see how many young people, grown to maturity, used to visit her, for her ever judicious and kind counsel; and were proud to acknowledge her as their first and truest friend.

An invitation to Aunt Elsie's to spend the holidays, was a reward eagerly sought for and highly prized; none were asked whose conduct during the year had not been marked with some sign of improvement; and no other incentive was necessary to awaken the most strenuous endeavors.

Dear good Aunt Elsie! no wonder the children loved to visit her: such piles of dough-nuts and krollers, such baskets of apples and bags of nuts were provided for their entertainment! to say nothing of the mince pies and little cranberry tarts, with the initial of each name cut from the crust and baked on the top, or the delicious plum pudding, of which they

were allowed to partake in moderation on Christmas Day, after they had done ample justice to the enormous turkey, fatted on purpose, and whose immense bulk was the wonderment of young eyes.

But good cheer was not the only pleasure to be enjoyed. Aunt Elsie was not troubled with nervous headaches; she liked the little folks to enjoy themselves in their own way, but without rudeness, and the loudest laugh and merriest shout never called forth a reprimand. There was a fine sloping hill at the back of the house, down which the sleds ran famously, and a large pond at the side for skating. Then, for indoor amusements, there was a great upper room, nearly the whole width of the house, containing a swing and a hammock, formerly belonging to Aunt Elsie's brother; and every one was at liberty to bring what they pleased to contribute to the general enjoyment. In the evening they all congregated in the parlor, and never was there a parlor better suited for the purpose than Aunt Elsie's.

It was a large room, as I have said, with rather a low ceiling, and four windows (for it was a corner room), well protected from the cold and storm by thick wooden shutters; and if a prying gust should insinuate itself between the chinks, it was prevented entering the apartment by the heavy curtains of crimson moreen that fell in great folds to the floor, and

behind whose ruddy screen the chilly little gust was soon converted into a genial atmosphere.

What fine places the thick folds of those curtains were for pinning handkerchiefs in the game of "hot buttered blue beans;" and the deep window seats made convenient hiding-places in the game of "hide and go seek." And though there were plenty of high-backed walnut chairs with stuffed seats, and low ottomans with faded embroidered covers, and two old-fashioned couches, there was still enough of room for a game of "blindman's buff," without risk of a black eye or bruised ankle against obtrusive furniture.

There was an antique piano, quite tunable enough for a country-dance or Virginia reel, and not sufficiently good to be ruined by indifferent performers. Then there were small work-stands, and a large centre table, covered with amusing and instructive games and pictures, and all sorts of materials for fancy knitting and embroideries; besides, a large and well-filled bookcase, for those who preferred a quiet enjoyment. The walls were hung with portraits of Aunt Elsie's family: shepherdesses in hoops and fardingales, and demure gentlemen in powdered hair and knee-buckles, all smiling benignly on the merry group beneath them, while they seemed to flourish in a green old age, being completely embowered in Christmas greens, with which the frames were wreathed. The

high China jars on the mantelpiece were filled with bunches of laurel, box and cedar, intermixed with the bright berries of the mountain ash and winter-green, and graceful festoons adorned the doorway and windows. What a cheerful friendly room it was, to be sure! of all places to pass the Christmas holidays, commend me to Aunt Elsie's, at Woodleigh.

Never was there a happier party of children than those now assembled in that cozy, old-fashioned parlor. There was little Norah Graham and her brother Willie, and Lucy and Mary Parker, fine intelligent girls of ten and twelve; and Harry Wilder, with his brother George, and cousins Grace and Clara; besides the orphans, Frank Field and his sweet sister, Lilias; little pet Lily, the darling of Aunt Elsie, and the delight of all. There was Bertha Carrol, the countess, as her companions called her, a stately girl just entering her fifteenth year, and her two younger brothers, Charles and Ernest, frank, joyous-hearted boys. These, with the gentle sisters Jessie and May Lester, completed the group, who were spending their holidays entirely at Aunt Elsie's.

Other visitors there were in plenty, but they spent a day or evening only with them, having other engagements to fulfil. As I have said that none but good children were invited to Aunt Elsie's, of course all the members of the party deserved this commenda-

tion; but each one possessed different traits of character, which were constantly elicited by the close association with others, as sparks are brought out by the contact of flint and steel. They had their faults too, but perhaps the certainty that a dismissal from Aunt Elsie's festivities would immediately follow every flagrant act of bad behavior, acted as a restraint, and kept them pleasantly united. Aunt Elsie sat in her high-backed chair, at the corner of the fireplace, knitting away, occasionally offering some suggestions as to the games in progress, and smiling kindly on all; giving sly hints as to the best places for hiding the handkerchief, and taking a lively interest in the sports about her.

"What are you poring over there?" asked Clara Wilder of her cousin George, as she stopped to gain breath after a hearty game of blindman's buff, and looking over his shoulder as she spoke.

"It is a fairy book, and I have just finished it," he answered, closing it as he spoke. "I do love fairy stories better than any thing in the world; when I get a library it shall be filled with them."

"Before you get a library you will have lost your relish for fairy tales," said Lucy Parker, laughing; "but they *are* delightful, I don't think I shall ever tire of the Arabian Nights."

"Nor I! nor I!" cried half a dozen voices.

"Do you remember the voyages of Sindbad, the sailor," asked Charles Carrol; "I like those the best."

"Not better than the story about the magic horse, all made of ebony and ivory, that could fly all over," chimed in little Lily.

"They are all beautiful," said Jessie Lester; and forthwith the little group clustered together and began discussing the merits of their favorite tales, for each seemed to have learned the Thousand and one Nights by heart.

"Heigho! I wish fairies were in fashion yet," exclaimed Harry Wilder; "nothing wonderful ever happens now-a-days; only think how delightful it would be to have a wishing cap, by which one could get all he desired."

"Or to have guardian fairies," said May Lester, "to prompt you to do right always."

"Every one has a guardian fairy of that kind, I think," said Aunt Elsie.

"A guardian fairy!" exclaimed many voices.

"I know what Aunt Elsie means, it is conscience," said May.

"There is a beautiful Eastern legend," said Aunt Elsie, "which runs thus:"

"Every man has two attendant angels, one on either shoulder. Whenever he does a good action

the angel on the right records and seals it, because a thing once well done is finished for ever. When he commits an evil deed, the angel on his left writes it down also, but he does *not* seal it; and if, before midnight the offender cries, 'Allah forgive me!' the angel drops a tear of joy upon the words and effaces them."

"What a lovely story," cried the children.

"I have often felt," said Mary Parker, "as if a voice whispered me when to do right."

"Yes; and when I commit a great fault, that voice seems to speak to me in tones like thunder," replied Ernest.

"Yet this is only the still small voice of conscience, murmuring in your heart," answered Aunt Elsie. "How wonderful is the power that spirit voice possesses; and how humbly should we listen to its lightest tone! It is indeed a monitor that should never be disregarded. And now, my dear children, since you are in the humor for fairy tales, I will, if you choose, read one out of an old manuscript, which has for many years been stored away in my bookcase. I cannot promise it will be as delightful as the Arabian Nights, but it has, at least, a moral which I will leave to your ingenuity to discover."

A general burst of delight followed this proposal, and the elder girls, taking up their knitting, seated

themselves at the table, while the boys gathered in a corner, and the little children, hugging up their dolls in their arms, drew their chairs to the fire. Aunt Elsie, in the meantime took from the upper shelf of her bookcase an old portfolio, and selecting one from the numerous manuscripts it contained, deliberately put on her glasses, and read the story of

The Two Voices:

OR THE SHADOW AND THE SHADOWLESS.

In a certain small village, there lived a very poor man, a basket-maker, named Hans. He lived quite alone in a mean little hut, which was his only inheritance. He had no wife nor children to comfort him, for he was too poor to marry, and he had for many years supported his infirm and bed-ridden mother. She was now dead, and though Hans was no longer obliged to toil for her support, yet he missed her very much, and felt miserably lonely, working day after day, without a soul to speak to, unless by chance a straggling villager should stop at the door to exchange a word with him. But his mother had taught him to be industrious, and con-

tented, so he worked steadily on, though he scarcely earned enough to keep the wolf from the door.

Hans might have grown old and gray in the midst of his humble labors, without indulging any vain longings for a better condition, if he had not had the misfortune to see the miller's pretty daughter, who smiled kindly on him, and so set him to thinking how happy he should be, if he had but her bright eyes and pleasant voice to cheer his lonely home. But Hans knew full well that he could hardly support himself, and what then could he do with a wife? So he was obliged to see the miller's daughter walk to church with rich farmer Trenck, while he had to keep indoors on account of his ragged coat. This state of things made poor Hans very unhappy.

"I am as comely and young as farmer Trenck," said he to himself, "and if I only had money, there is no telling what might happen." Then he fell to thinking how he should obtain the gold he so much coveted; and these thoughts kept him awake at night when he should have been sleeping, and made him sit, idly twisting the rushes through the day, when he ought to have been working.

It so happened one day when Hans went out to cut some rushes for his baskets, that as he stooped down, with his knife in his hand, he saw a leather wallet lying among the reeds. He dropped his knife

and seized the wallet. It was very heavy, and as he turned it over in his hand, a bright gold piece rolled out upon his palm. Hans felt as if his heart had stopped beating. He rubbed his eyes to be sure he was not dreaming, and then looked round to see if any one was near. But nobody was in sight, and Hans, sitting down on a green bank, counted out the bright gold pieces, one by one, and then dropped them again into the leathern bag, thinking all the time that the chink of the precious metal was the sweetest music he had ever heard.

There were ninety-one gold pieces in the wallet, and as Hans, after satisfying himself twenty times by counting them over and over, finally tied the string tightly about the bag, he heard a delicate little voice close to his ear say:

"What are you going to do with the money, Hans?"

Poor Hans started up in affright, for he thought that some one had been watching him all the time. He looked all around but could see nothing, when again the voice repeated:

"What are you going to do with the money, Hans? it is not yours."

Again Hans looked about him, and now he saw, seated on his right shoulder, a small but beautiful creature, with silver wings, and bearing a star on its

forehead, which cast a bright radiance all around. Before he could recover from his surprise, so as to reply to the question the tiny figure had twice asked, another voice, very unlike the first, and sounding as if it came through a brazen tube, answered for him:

"Hans will keep the money, to be sure; he found it, and it is his."

"He has no right to keep what belongs to another," answered the silver voice.

"How does he know the real owner?" said the brazen voice; "whoever dropped it considers it lost. Hans is a poor man, and this is a piece of good luck which he ought not to throw away."

While this dialogue was going on, Hans, looking towards his *left* shoulder, beheld a small dark form, enveloped in a sort of dazzling haze that prevented him from seeing its outline with distinctness. This was not a silvery light, such as emanated from the spirit of the silver voice, but a sort of lurid glare, like the reflection from molten copper. Yet there was something strangely fascinating in its brightness, which tempted one to look again. Hans at last mustered courage to speak:

"Who are ye both, that thus dispute about my affairs?" he asked.

"I am the voice of the Shadowless; whoso followeth my advice shall never commit sin or know de-

spair;" answered the star-crowned figure on his right shoulder.

"And men call me the voice of the Shadow," replied the brazen tone, with a harsh laugh; "whoso followeth me, shall have riches in plenty, and a life of joy."

Hans cast down his eyes in thought, and there, on the greensward, rested the shadow of the brazen one, a dark, unshapely thing, portraying his true form divested of the dazzling glare that surrounded it, and twice the size of the figure itself. Hans started and trembled. There was no shadow near the figure on his right, but a soft light like a reflected moonbeam lay shimmering on the grass, the reflection of her silver wings.

"Pooh, pooh, man, never be afraid of a shadow," said the brazen tone, jeeringly; "that is the best proof you can have that I am a real, tangible being, and ready to serve you. The words of the Shadowless are all very well for ordinary occasions, but at a time like this listen to me."

"What shall I do with the wallet?" asked Hans; "I don't want to keep it, if it is dishonest. I could not bear to be a thief."

"Never call yourself hard names," answered the brazen tone. "The act of finding, and of stealing, are two very different things. The facts are these:

Somebody loses a purse—you are fortunate enough to find it; therefore it is your own, of course, to do with as you like."

"Not so," interrupted the Shadowless. "The money must have a proper owner; it is the duty of Hans to discover him, if possible, and restore it to him; that is what he *will* do, as an honest man."

Hans winced at these words; and the Shadow, seeming to perceive that he had gone too far, replied,

"Well, there is, at least, no harm in Hans taking the wallet home with him, and thinking it over a while; it will be much safer in his chest than lying out here in the reeds."

This suggestion pleased Hans; but the Shadowless spoke:

"Do not listen to the tempter, Hans, but take the money at once to the justice, and tell him all about it. If once within your grasp, you know not to what you may be tempted—perhaps even to steal."

Hans was offended at this implied doubt of his strength; so he said, angrily, "Do you think me a child, that I cannot be trusted? I choose to take the wallet with me, and I will."

"Hans! Hans!" murmured the silver voice, imploringly, "drive me not from you, by wilful obstinacy; know me as your true friend, and trust me, all will be well at the last."

A pang went through the heart of Hans at these words; and he was just about yielding, when the Shadow interposed.

"How childish your fears are," he said. "What! afraid to trust yourself one night with a little bag of gold? I thought you were more of a man. Suppose you had not found the wallet to-day, it would have laid among the reeds all night. Is it not, in reality, much safer with you? you can carry it to the justice to-morrow."

These specious words decided Hans, and the soft, imploring voice of the Shadowless was no longer heeded. He arose, and went towards his home, attended by the voice of the Shadow, who kept sounding in his ear the praises of his manliness and strength.

Hans observed that the shadow on the greensward was larger than before, and he thought it obscured the sunlight; but the voice of flattery sounded sweet in his ear, and the lurid light hovering on his shoulder dazzled him; and so he went on, not heeding that the shimmering light had gone from his pathway, and that the star-crowned form sat drooping, dimmed, and silent.

When Hans arrived at his cottage, he carefully barred the door, a precaution he had never before thought of using; and then once more spread the

glittering pieces out upon the board before him, and counted them, one by one.

"There are just ninety-one pieces," suggested the Shadow; "one piece would buy a new coat; don't you think you deserve something for finding the wallet, Hans?"

Hans listened, but said nothing: he was thinking that if he had a new coat, he might walk to church with the miller's pretty daughter; but the people would wonder where he got a new coat. It seemed as if the Shadow knew his thoughts, for it went on:

"You might go to the town, you know, and perhaps there might be something owing you;—who knows? The coat is bought with money owed to you, eh, Hans? And then, on Sunday, when farmer Trenck comes along, he will have to stand one side;—and look, now, there comes the miller's pretty daughter!"

Hans looked up, and there she went, sure enough, looking more blooming than ever.

"You can replace the piece when you earn it, and restore the wallet then; no one knows *when* you found it," said the Shadow.

Hans sighed heavily; then he took up the bright pieces and dropped them in the bag, all save one; *that* he left upon the table.

"Thou shalt not steal," murmured the silver

voice, but now the tone was faint as a dying echo; and the brazen tone drowned it at once with a loud laugh, and the inquiry,

"Who talks of stealing? Hans borrows the piece while, and hurts no one by it."

It was now dark, and Hans threw himself on the bed, after carefully locking up the bag in his chest, and hiding the one piece beneath his pillow. His sleep was restless and disturbed; and early the next morning, unrefreshed, but determined, and not daring to question himself, he arose, took the gold piece, and hastened away to the adjoining town.

It seemed to Hans that a dark pall was thrown over every thing, and the shadow that was flung on the ground at his side increased as he went; but the voice of the Shadow never ceased urging him on, and the Shadowless was silent and dim.

The tailor, who knew Hans well, looked surprised when Hans offered the piece of gold, but he believed him when he said it was money long owed him; and having fitted him a handsome coat, with bright buttons, handsomer even than farmer Trenck's, Hans, with his purchase, turned towards his home.

The morrow was Sunday, and the voice of the Shadow whispered of triumph in the new coat; but, despite all he could say, the dark pall seemed thrown over all things, and the fearful shadow on the

grass increased fearfully, while ever and anon the silver voice of the Shadowless murmured, "Hans, art thou doing well?" until at last, in an almost agony, he reached his home, and, not daring to look at his new coat, he threw himself on his bench. The rushes lay scattered about him, and a basket, unfinished, was near; but work he could not; a gloom filled the cottage, and the dark Shadow lay crouched at his feet.

Thus the day wore on unheeded by Hans, who, alternately listening to the brazen tone, with something akin to confidence, and oppressed by the spell that bound him, sat listlessly twisting the rushes between his fingers, when a neighbor suddenly stopped at the door, and cried:

"Hast heard the news, Hans? the miller was robbed the night before last, when coming from market; he was knocked down and his wallet taken from him, before his two men came up; the robbers fled, and he has posted a reward for the thief. It was a great loss, of a certainty; ninety-one heavy pieces; a fortune for a poor man, Hans."

Hans sat motionless, and the neighbor supposing him busy, and unwilling to gossip, passed on. Hour after hour wore away, and Hans sat gazing on the wall, when the voice of the Shadow roused him: "Come, Hans, be a man," it said, confidently; "it is all or nothing now; no one will ever suspect you of hav

ing the money. If the robber is caught, so much the better. I suppose he flung the wallet aside, for fear of detection, meaning to return for it again. It is a lucky chance, that an honest man like yourself found it. The miller is rich; and by and by, when you improve in appearances, and open a shop for yourself, you will marry the miller's pretty daughter, and thus, you see, it will all be restored to him fourfold. Cheer up; I will show you some of the things that will be. Look before you."

Hans looked up, and there, on the whitewashed wall, beheld what appeared to be three compartments, like picture frames, in the first of which, seen only by the lurid dazzling glare which the Shadow cast upon it, was a group of figures. Hans looked earnestly, and recognized himself in the handsome new coat, supporting on his arm the miller's pretty daughter who smiled upon him, while the old father looked on approvingly, and rich farmer Trenck walked sullenly alone.

Hans' heart beat high, and turning to the second, he saw a church and a bridal party; and the groom and bride were himself and the miller's daughter now his very heart stood still with ecstasy.

Still he looked on the third, and there, in a lofty room, rich with carved mouldings, and costly furniture, he beheld a matron surrounded by blooming

children, and despite the cap and additonal years, he knew the beautiful face of the miller's daughter. Seated at the table, at the other side of the room, appeared the figure of himself, looking as if years had passed lightly over him. He was dressed in the robes of a justice, and appeared writing. Hans shuddered; the scene recalled the present too vividly, and the Shadow hastened to throw so dazzling a light over the picture, as to blind him to its application. When suddenly the voice of the Shadowless spoke, this time loudly and distinctly:

"Look once more, Hans."

And Hans did look, and now the lurid glare was gone, and seen in the silvery light of the star of the Shadowless, he beheld himself pale, haggard, and fearful, with the miller's daughter on his arm, while before him went the fearful Shadow, larger, more fearful than ever.

He trembled.

At the second picture the bridal party was indeed there, but a black pall enveloped every thing, and the fearful Shadow filled the church with its hideous presence.

At the third he saw himself, and all the group about him, completely enveloped in its fearful gloom; the countenance of the miller's daughter was worn and faded, and for himself, seen in that silver light

of truth, he scarcely recognized his own features, so changed and terrible had their expression become.

Hans covered his face.

"You have now seen the visions of the false, by the light of the true," said the Shadowless. "Look once more and behold the truth itself."

As she spoke, Hans looked up, and beheld the former visions swept away; and there pictured before him, was the judgment hall, and himself arraigned before the bar, charged with the crime of highway robbery, and evidently receiving sentence of condemnation.

Hans bowed his head in agony.

"Oh, star-crowned Spirit, guide me, and keep me from temptation!" he fervently ejaculated, and at that word, the dark form vanished; the Shadow was gone from before him, and in its place was the soft clear shimmering light from the silver wings of the Shadowless.

Hans looked up, it was early dawn; but the sunlight seemed brighter to him, and a halo to rest upon the hills. He arose, and, prompted by the bright form that no longer rested upon his shoulder, but now nestled in his bosom, he took the new coat from its hiding-place, and unlocking his chest, took out the bag of gold. He shuddered when he touched it, and involuntarily looked about him, fearing again to meet

the tempter. But the silver voice said cheeringly—"Fear nothing, Hans; while I am next thy heart, he cannot harm thee."

And so encouraged, he stepped boldly out, with his new coat beneath his arm, and the bag of gold in his pocket.

There was no one stirring at that early hour, but he walked joyfully on; for ever as he went, the silver light made a bright path before him, and seemed to widen and lengthen as he passed on. The tailor had just arisen, and much astonished was he, when Hans returned the coat, and begged the gold should be restored; telling him how he had found the miller's money, and had been tempted. The tailor was a just man, and did as Hans desired; the piece was once more returned to its fellows, and he accompanied Hans towards the justice's house. As they neared it, they saw quite a crowd assembled, who, when they saw Hans, all shouted:

"Here he is himself; we have got him!" and they seized him as they spoke. "So it was you who robbed the miller," cried they; "we found your knife among the rushes."

But Hans looked down, and saw the Shadowless spirit resting in his bosom, and thus replying, "Not so, my friends; come with me and learn all," he passed on, nothing daunted, to the justice hall.

And there, when the justice came in his robes to hear the case, and the miller appeared and told his story, and the men showed the knife which they swore belonged to Hans; then Hans himself stood up, and placing the bag of gold upon the table before him, told how he had found it, and had been tempted by the Shadow; and as he went on, and described the vision he had seen, and so discovered his love for the miller's pretty daughter, and told how the Shadowless had shown him all these things in their true light:—as he spoke, the silver wings of the star-crowned spirit in his bosom shone with new lustre, and the clear soft light spread until it filled the council chamber, and so fell upon his countenance like a glory.

It penetrated the breasts of all who heard him; the wing of the Shadowless fanned their hearts, and with one loud voice they acquitted him with honor.

And more than this; the miller himself took him home that day, and in the new coat which the tailor had fitted, and which the miller paid for, Hans walked to church beside the miller's daughter.

Not many Sundays after, a bridal was celebrated in the little church. No dark Shadow was there, but instead, the clear, soft, silver light from the wing of the Shadowless, floated like incense around

them; and when years had passed, and Hans the miller was, with his wife and children, called the happiest family in all the town, it was the same silver spirit-light that brightened and glorified their dwelling, because the star-crowned Shadowless now made her abiding place in the heart of each, and to her they had dedicated the fireside altar of their home.

Aunt Elsie paused.

"It was the Spirit of Truth!" burst forth little Norah Graham.

"And the Shadow of Temptation," said Grace. "Dear Aunt Elsie, how I thank you for your story."

"So do we all," cried every voice, now thoroughly aroused from the absorbing interest each had felt.

"Whenever I am tempted to do wrong, I shall think of the voice of the Shadow," said George.

"I fancy I can see the fearful dark thing increasing at every step," said Frank, thoughtfully.

"That means the consciousness of sin, that always accompanies a wrong act, I think," said Jessie, earnestly.

"How the beautiful star-crowned spirit brought every thing right at last," remarked Bertha.

"She was patient, and long enduring," answered May Lester, "the very spirit of loving truth."

And thus each had a comment upon the story, which, although possessing none of the attributes of their favorite Arabian Nights, pleased and interested them, while little Lily wound up the criticism by clapping her hands and exclaiming:

"And so he got the new coat, with bright buttons, and married the miller's pretty daughter at last, and was as happy as happy could be, after all! Oh, Aunt Elsie, I will always mind the Spirit of Truth."

"I trust you will, my love, and that each may profit by my little story," said Aunt Elsie, smiling on the little girl. "And now, here comes Dinah with the supper tray; and after supper, and a game of romps, it will be time to think about bed."

CHAPTER II.

The next day was stormy and disagreeable, and after spending the morning in various sports in the large upper room devoted to their use, the children all assembled in the parlor. It was just twilight; the snow fell fast and furious without, and drifted and blew against the window panes as if anxious to get a peep within. The fire blazed up merrily, lighting the room in fitful spells; the little girls were clustered together, deep in the mysteries of a doll's wedding that was to take place the next morning with great pomp and parade. The minister and groom were being dressed by the larger girls, while the little ones thought themselves very useful in making nondescript articles for each.

The boys stood by the windows, watching the snow flakes and projecting the building of a great sled, large enough to accommodate the whole party.

There was a great deal of talking and arguing

between the members of each group, and presently little Lily's voice rose in tones of expostulation.

"Now Mary, if that is not too bad; you promised, you know you did, that my new dolly should be the bride, and now you won't let her even come to the wedding."

"But Norah's doll is already dressed in white muslin, and yours is not dressed at all," answered Bertha Carrol, "and we have not time, you know, to dress it now."

"She shall come to the wedding though, even if she is not handsomely dressed," replied Jessie Lester. "I will lend her a dress of my doll's; we will manage to make it fit."

"No," cried little Lily, angrily, while tears stood in her eyes, "no: if she can't come dressed like a lady, she shan't come at all; it is all Mary's fault, and she knows it too, for she promised and promised to dress her, ever so many days ago. Grace offered to do it, when I first got her; but Mary said she should like so to dress her for me, that I promised she might. I kept *my* word, but she has broken *hers*, and I will never, never believe her again."

Little Lily now fairly burst into tears, while some laughed at her childish grief, and Grace tried to comfort her; while Mary coaxed her, saying she would dress it magnificently yet, and no matter if she was

not ready this time; they would have another wedding.

But Lily still declared she would not believe a word she said, and spoke so vehemently, that Aunt Elsie, entering the room, came and inquired the cause of the trouble. Mary Parker, who felt that she had done wrong, frankly told the cause of little Lily's disappointment and tears, and offered to do all in her power to retrieve it.

Aunt Elsie looked grave.

"The matter is in itself a mere trifle," she said, "but you should be careful never to promise any thing to a child unless you perform it. By allowing a little child to see the promises of others so lightly regarded, awakens distrust, and teaches them not only to place no value on promises, but at last to be regardless of truth itself. If you knew you could not dress the doll, Mary, why did you not let Grace do so?"

"I intended dressing it immediately," said Mary, blushing, "but I put it off, thinking that I could do it any time. I am very sorry that I had not done it at once, for I cannot bear to see Lily disappointed."

"Never mind, Mary, don't be sorry," spoke little Lily, who was very sorry herself, to hear Aunt Elsie speak reprovingly to Mary, whom, after all, she dearly

loved. "I shan't cry any more," she said, looking up with a sunny smile.

Aunt Elsie kissed the little rosebud mouth thus upturned, while she said to Mary, smiling:

"*Any* time is *no* time, too often, my dear child; and now suppose you all set to work, cannot the doll be dressed this evening? I dare say you are all willing to assist, as this is quite a momentous occasion, and I am afraid the poor dolly would be broken-hearted, thus to be deserted, when she expected to be the bride."

The children laughed, and readily promised to help, when Mary said:

"But I have nothing prepared to make her dress; it ought to be very handsome."

"Well, well," said Aunt Elsie, kindly, "I will bring out my box of treasures after tea, and you can select something pretty enough, I dare say; and then, when you are all busily engaged, perhaps I may bring out the old portfolio and find another story."

This proposition was hailed with delight, the box of treasures was in itself an almost inexhaustible source of pleasure to the girls. Such bundles of scraps of rich brocades and delicate satins as it contained, with any quantity of cast-off feathers, and flowers, ribbons, ends of lace, beads, gold and silver

cord, and spangles, enough to dress twenty dolls; and from which Aunt Elsie had occasionally drawn forth some wished-for article of doll's apparel. Now, to have this box at command was an unexpected delight, and there seemed little chance of the story gaining much attention from the girls. Tea was over, and the boys around the large table were variously engaged, two or three in making a chess-board and carving the men, little Frank Field holding yarn while Ernest wound a huge ball, and one or two of the others drawing. They each had their materials arranged so as to occasion no interruption, and constantly urged the girls to be silent. They, however, were clustered about a work-stand, busily turning over the contents of the treasure box, while exclamations of admiration continually broke forth from the group. There was a long and spirited debate as to the material to be chosen, and the whole evening would probably have been consumed in examining the treasure box, had not Aunt Elsie joined them, and reminding them of their promise to dress the doll before bedtime, assisted their taste with her judgment; and the proper materials having been chosen, the treasure box was carefully put aside, and each one having her part assigned her, set earnestly about it, and begged Aunt Elsie to commence, as they could work so much faster while she read to them.

Little Lily placed the footstool and found the spectacles, then seating herself at Aunt Elsie's feet, laid her curly head upon the old lady's lap, who, having comfortably settled herself in her high-backed hair, and glanced around to see that all were in order, selected another manuscript from the old portfolio, and commenced reading what she called

The Minute Fairies.

In a pretty little cottage, not a thousand miles perhaps from Betzendorf, there lived a lone widow with her little daughter Enna. The widow was not rich, she toiled from sunrise until sunset; and as Enna grew from infancy into more helpful childhood, her mother taught her to assist her in various ways.

When Enna first learned to hold the yarn which her mother wound, and to gather twigs wherewith to light their fire, she was delighted with her new occupation; but as she became older, and had a will of her own, she found it much pleasanter to saunter through the green and shady lanes, or to lounge dreamily on the sunny bank, than to keep within doors studying her lesson, or performing the tasks which her mother required of her.

To be idle, Enna thought was to be happy. No matter what was to be done, she always put it off until she felt more inclined to do it, and this time never coming, her duties were necessarily hastily and badly performed. One lovely summer's afternoon, she went with her little bucket to draw water from the spring, which was some distance from her mother's house. She sauntered idly along, and on reaching the spring, put down her bucket, and throwing herself upon the grass, gazed listlessly on the bright water that, issuing from the crevices of a rock, poured itself into a kind of basin that nature had scooped out on purpose, and so came bubbling up like a fountain, close to the little girl's feet. There were long green branches covered with graceful quivering leaves, trailing on the grass at her side, and wild flowers scrambled over the rock and peeped timidly down upon the face of the silver spring, sometimes venturing to cast a blossom-laden sprig upon its bosom; the little birds twittered their good-night song to each other from amid the thick branches, and the great sun himself, just sinking to rest behind the distant hills, sent a bright golden ray forth from his purple canopy of clouds, to quiver on the surface of the lovely spring fountain that had truthfully reflected his own noonday glory.

It was a summer twilight, as lovely as twilight

could be, but Enna heeded none of the beauty about her; she looked at the bucket, and then at the spring, with a discontented air.

"Oh dear, oh dear," at last cried the little girl, "how I wish I was rich and had servants in plenty; I hate to carry water and make the fire: how much pleasanter it is to be here. Oh, how I wish I had nothing to do. I wish I was happy."

So saying, she sighed, and taking up the bucket, bent over the spring, when lo and behold, she saw its surface gently agitated, and far away down in its depths she perceived what appeared to be a ball of light arising to the surface. It came slowly up, and upon reaching the top, proved to be a large bubble bright with all the hues of the rainbow. The bubble rested a second on the water, then parted in the centre, thus forming a crescent shape, while it slowly sailed towards her.

As Enna looked on in mute surprise, she saw a beautiful tiny female standing in the bubble that seemed like a triumphal car. This little creature had wings of the varied hues of a gorgeous butterfly, her gossamer robes floated like silver mist about her, and she held in her hand a slender silver wand. As she drew near the bank, Enna saw that she had soft smiling eyes and long shining bright hair, and that she looked kindly upon her.

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Presently the bubble floated amid a tuft of forget-me-nots that grew close to the water's edge, and the beautiful fairy spreading her graceful wings, alighted close at Enna's side.

Enna was too childish and untutored to feel augh but delighted surprise, at the presence of the lovely little fairy, and so she said:

"Who are you, little beauty, and from whence did you come?"

The fairy smiled at Enna's fearless questioning, and replied in a voice soft and silvery as the rippling of a brook on the white pebbles:

"I am the Lady of the Spring, Enna. Have you never heard that on a certain midsummer day, there is one particular moment in which any wish that a mortal makes, while looking on this fountain, shall be fulfilled? You have unknowingly chosen the very moment to wish you were happy, and now I have come to grant your wish."

"Are you really in earnest? have *you* such power?" asked Enna, her eyes opening wide with astonishment; and then assured by the kind smile of the fairy, she exclaimed:

"Oh, how delightful this is, and how happy I shall be. I wish to be rich, to have servants, to ride in a fine coach, and have nothing to do."

"Not so fast," interrupted the Lady of the Spring;

"you wished to be happy, but the way in which your happiness is brought about, must rest with me. However, as there are certain conditions which you seem to think essential, they must be attended to. You say, Enna, if you had nothing to do, you would be perfectly happy?"

"Yes," answered the little girl, in a more subdued manner; "I should like to be elegantly dressed as you are, and have nothing to do but sail about as you do."

"You are very much mistaken, Enna, in supposing me idle," said the fairy; "I have my duties as well as yourself. It is I who keep this living spring from stagnating by constantly agitating it, and sending the bright bubbles, who are my servants, up to its surface. Indeed, it is one of the conditions to which our race owe their existence, that they should be constantly employed; idleness brings its own punishment to us. Do you see those unsightly stones at the bottom of the spring? they were once beings as bright and brilliant as myself, but failing to employ themselves for any good purpose, they gradually lost their beauty, and became the dull heavy things you now see, incapable of motion and unconscious of enjoyment. The one among us who is the most active, is chosen queen, a distinction conferred upon me, and which I should forfeit did I yield to indolence. So

you see, Enna, that for me at least, idleness has no charm."

"Yes," answered Enna, a little abashed, "but your work is not at all like mine: if I were a fairy I should like very well to be employed at such delightful tasks as yours. But I have many disagreeable things to do—I don't like to be busy from morning till night."

"You are but a very little child, and have much to learn," said the fairy, gravely. "But you must see from what I have told you, how impossible it is that I should gratify your desire to be idle. I will make you happy, however; and to accomplish this, I will give you servants in plently."

Enna's eyes danced with eager delight. "With plenty of servants I need never work," she exclaimed.

"Wait a little, until you hear the conditions on which they come to you," replied the Lady of the Spring "I have told you that none of our race can be idle and live, neither can they exist in the same atmosphere with indolence. The fairy servants I will give you, must necessarily be ignorant of your duties, and you must teach them by your example what they are to do. As they are placed under your care, you are responsible for them; and I warn you that your idleness will cause their death. These fairy servants are like all of our race, very small, but they

are capable of performing wonderful things; and if by your example, you properly instruct them in their present duties, they will, after a time, accomplish works of which you do not even dream. But to make them valuable servants, you must lay aside for a time your desire to be idle. Are you willing to accept them on these conditions?"

"Oh, yes!" exclaimed Enna, joyfully. "I will gladly be industrious a while, that I may do nothing ever afterwards. I thank you a thousand times. But when shall I begin?"

"Come here to-morrow morning, when the first sunbeam falls on the fountain, and here, amid this tuft of forget-me-nots, you will find a small casket, curiously wrought; put it in your bosom without opening it, and carry it with you all day. At sunset come here again, and when the last ray quivers on the fountain's breast, take out your casket and open it; you will then see how you have fulfilled the conditions you now accept. The casket will contain a number of minute fairies, as they are called, who are willing to become your servants for life, provided you keep them employed. If, by your example, you have kept them busy, you will find the casket filled with beautiful little creatures, radiant as myself. But if you have wasted your time, it will be filled with little

leaden figures, dull and inanimate. Do you understand, Enna?"

"Yes," answered the little girl, thoughtfully, "the minute fairies will be mine, and I must teach them to work for me, by showing them how, myself. How long will it take them to learn of me?"

"That depends entirely upon yourself," replied the Lady of the Spring, encouragingly. "Every morning, at the first dawn of sunrise, the casket will be lying here, replenished with fresh servants for you; and when, for three successive days, you can open it at sunset and find no leaden figures in it, your task will be accomplished, and the minute fairies bound to serve you for ever."

"Then the more industrious I am the sooner they will learn," answered the little girl. "Well, I will try with all my might."

The fairy smiled encouragingly. "That is right, Enna, you see it all depends upon yourself, whether or not you shall have servants in plenty; and now hasten home, and remember to be here at the first ray of sunshine to-morrow."

The beautiful fairy spread her wings as she spoke, and floated away, out of Enna's sight, and the little girl, after filling her bucket, returned thoughtfully to her home.

Enna determined to say nothing about her adven-

ture to her mother, but she was unusually silent at supper, and went early to bed. The next morning the little girl awoke at earliest peep of dawn, and rising softly, went down stairs without disturbing any one; then taking her little bucket, hastened away to the well. This time she did not linger on her way, but arrived at the spring, and filling her bucket, sat down to await the first sunbeam. Enna, like most other people who do not value time, seldom rose early, and she was therefore surprised and delighted with the quiet and cool appearance of every thing around. The little birds were twittering about among the branches, singing their earliest songs; the dew laid heavily upon the grass, and the wild flowers were just unfolding their leaves and lifting up their heads from their grassy pillows, as though waiting the command of the sun to arise. Presently the soft rosy light that had been slowly spreading over the eastern sky, deepened to a richer glow, and one bright golden sunbeam pierced through the intertwining branches, and quivered on the waters of the spring. Enna started up and looked among the tuft of forget-me-nots, scarcely expecting to find the casket, but inclined to think her fairy adventure all a dream. But there, nestled among the tiny blossoms, was a small curiously wrought silver box, so bright that it dazzled the little girl's eyes when the sun fell on it. Her

heart beat with delight as she put the casket in her bosom, and gayly taking up her bucket went singing on her path.

Very much surprised was Enna's mother, when she saw her little girl returning thus early with her bucket filled from the spring. She had thought Enna was yet asleep. The good woman kissed her daughter's rosy cheek, and called her an industrious little bee, to be abroad so early, and Enna was so well pleased to be thus praised that she felt happier than ever.

"Now," thought Enna, "what is my first task? I am up so early that I shall have a fine opportunity to set my minute fairies a good example. Well, I will weed the garden patch before the sun falls on it." And away she ran to the little garden, and by the time her mother called her in to breakfast, the weeds had all disappeared.

Incited by her mother's praise, and her desire to teach her fairy servitors, Enna performed all her morning tasks with unwonted alacrity. She washed the breakfast things, swept up the floor, arranged her own room, watered the flowers, fed the chickens, and did every thing her mother bid her so cheerfully that the tears came in the good woman's eyes, at this unexpected change.

After Enna had performed her usual duties, she

took up her book to study her lesson. She began very much in earnest, but presently her thoughts wandered away to the spring, and she commenced congratulating herself on her industry, and speculating on the fine times she would have after she had taught her minute fairies how to work for her.

She sat idly with the book on her knee, when her mother asked her if she was too tired to study, and told her she need not learn her lesson unless she pleased.

This roused Enna to a sense of her idleness, and she studied away in good earnest. She soon learned her lesson, and recited it perfectly.

In the afternoon Enna was winding some yarn for her mother, when a neighbor came in, and the little girl soon became interested in her idle gossip, and let the yarn fall idly from her hand. When the neighbor rose to go, Enna saw that it was very near sunset, and so hastened to finish the yarn. She was very anxious to open the casket. She felt pretty sure that all the fairies would be safe, and so, taking her bucket, hastened away to the spring.

The sun was just sinking as she reached the silver water, and his last beam was quivering on its surface, when she took the silver casket from her bosom, and with trembling fingers touched the spring. The casket flew open, and there within it

were numbers of tiny beautiful creatures, who, as Enna endeavored to count them, spread their gauze like wings, and floated away. Enna looked into the casket, expecting to find it empty, but to her disappointment, there were a great many little leaden figures remaining.

Enna endeavored to recollect at what time during the day she had been idle, and remembered how she had sat listening to the neighbor's gossip, and how she had forgotten to study while indulging in golden dreams. She felt sorry and disappointed, but resolved not to be discouraged on the very first day of trial; and so, after carefully depositing the casket among the tuft of forget-me-nots, went thoughtfully home, full of good resolutions for the future.

Several days passed on with varied success. One afternoon was wasted with an idle companion; another hour slipped away unperceived while she watched the antics of an organ-grinder's monkey; but still, when Enna opened the casket at sunset, she thought the leaden figures seemed to diminish in number; and thus encouraged, she went hopefully on, each day endeavoring to avoid the faults of the preceding.

The little girl was unconsciously forming habits of industry; and what was at first a task had now become a pleasure. She was happier than she had ever been before; her mother praised her; no scold-

ings awaited her for neglected duties; the neighbors spoke kindly, and the hours of recreation after her tasks were done had never seemed so bright and delightful. Little Enna was in a fair way to have "servants in plenty," according to the fairy's promise, when a new trial befell her.

One morning, upon awaking, she saw the sky look dark and lowering, and heard great rain-drops pattering on the roof. Here was a trial. Enna did not like to rise so early on a dark rainy morning, and go through the wet grass to the spring; and she laid still, thinking perhaps it would stop raining in a little while. But the clouds seemed determined to give the grass a good drenching, and Enna's mother twice called the little girl before she arose, and slowly dressing herself, went with a very ill grace to the spring. It was very late, and Enna began to fear the casket would not be there; but she espied it in its usual place, and, hastily grasping it, returned home sullen and cross.

Alas, for poor Enna! that day was a miserable one to her. Every thing seemed to go wrong. She had wasted so much time in bed, that her tasks were hurriedly done. The yarn *would* tangle, and the needle would *not* be threaded, and the lesson would *not* be learned, and Enna lost her temper, and even

the bright sunshine that broke amid the clouds just before sunset could not restore her good humor.

It was with many misgivings that Enna opened her casket by the spring side on that evening. She felt that the day had been misspent, and knew there were many, very many, leaden images in the box; but even she, was scarcely prepared for the sight that met her eyes upon lifting the lid. There appeared to be myriads of little shapeless leaden things within, and the few who floated out had lost much of their brilliant hue; she could have counted them, so small was the number, had she not been absorbed in grief at the sight of the leaden minute fairies.

"Oh, what shall I do! what shall I do!" sobbed the little girl; "I have wickedly killed so many fairy servants, that the Lady of the Spring will never trust me again! what a very, *very* idle girl I have been!" and she hid her face in her hands and wept loudly and long. She wished the spring fairy would come to her again, that she might tell her how sorry she was, and beg her not to withdraw her promise; and she waited till the sun had long sunk behind the distant hills, and the pale stars were reflected like spangles in the spring, hoping the fairy would appear, but she did not come. Enna returned home that night sadder but far wiser than before.

The first sunbeam had scarcely kissed the spring

on the next morning when Enna stood trembling at its brink, hoping, yet fearing the casket would not be there; but, as her eye sought the accustomed place, she espied the shining box, and clasped it with an eagerness she had never known before.

From that day Enna had the satisfaction to find the leaden figures decrease every time the casket was opened; and one evening, to her inexpressible delight, not one remained. She was now near the goal of her wishes; and after several failures, she was happy in finding it filled with bright fairies for two succeeding evenings. You may be sure she tried harder than ever the next day, and with a beating heart repaired to the spring side and opened her casket. Out soared a cloud of brilliant little creatures, not one leaden figure was there! Enna's task was done!

As the little girl gazed after the floating forms with delighted satisfaction, she heard her own name called in a sweet low voice, and looking down beheld her friend, the Lady of the Spring.

"You have accomplished your task, Enna," said the fairy, smiling kindly on her, while her golden hair floated back upon the breeze, "and are entitled to your reward."

Enna blushed, but found courage to reply—"It took me much longer than I had thought; I did not

know how idle I was, and feared I had offended you by destroying so many of your fairies."

"No," said the fairy, gravely, "the minute fairies belong to one who is willing to sacrifice them in attaining good. You have shown much perseverance, Enna, in conquering your idle habits, and I think there is no fear that you will destroy many more minute fairies. You have conquered yourself, my dear little girl, and thus have won a great victory. And now," she added, smiling, "I must remember the reward—'plenty of servants and nothing to do.' Was not that the wish, Enna?"

Enna was silent a few moments, and then replied timidly, "Do you know I think I should not be contented now, were I to be idle and have nothing to do. I am so happy, and all my tasks seem so pleasant; and yet," she added, blushing, "I should so like to *learn more*—I would like so much to see the wonderful things you said the minute fairies could do."

A kind smile, bright and beautiful as a sunbeam, lit up the lovely face of the fairy, as she bent her soft eyes tenderly on the little girl and said:

"You have discovered the great secret, my Enna; you have found the true value of the servants I promised you. They will, indeed, teach you many wonderful things. Go on, and perfect the lesson you have so bravely begun, and learn from the minute fairies

how much may be accomplished by a proper valuation of time."

As she spoke, she clasped around Enna's neck a rare locket, composed of a brilliant stone set round with more than twenty smaller ones, each in their turn encircled by many small and very dazzling jewels.

"Wear this for my sake, Enna," she said; "and, by marking the varying lustre of these gems, you will know whether your minute fairies are doing their duty: henceforward they are bound to serve you for ever. Farewell, my child, go and prosper."

As she spoke, she floated away from Enna's wistful gaze, and the little girl returned joyously home.

And what happened then?

Why Enna's servants proved most faithful ones, and gave evidence of their power and worth as years sped on; for Enna, profiting by their teachings, became the finest scholar, the neatest handmaiden, the earliest riser, and most industrious girl for miles around. Her cheeks wore the glow of health, her eyes sparkled with cheerful good-humor, and her form was light and graceful with exercise and youth. Busy as a bee, and happy as a bird, Enna found that the improvement of time brings health, wealth, and happiness.

There was a hush, as Aunt Elsie finished her story; not a word had been spoken during the reading; and now, Mary Parker, rising from her seat, came and laid little Lily's doll on Aunt Elsie's knee, and said, while tears stood in her eyes and her voice trembled:

"You chose that story for my especial benefit, dear Aunt Elsie, I am sure, and I thank you for its application. There," she added, smiling, as she pointed to the doll, "there is my first offering on the shrine of the minute fairies."

Aunt Elsie drew Mary towards her, and kissed her blooming cheek fondly. "I do not mean to be personal in my selections," she said kindly, "but I will hereafter read any story that is applicable to the transactions of the day. I think, Mary, we may all find much to apply to ourselves in a story inculcating the value of time."

"That we may," answered many voices, as the group rose from the table and gathered around the fire.

"And now, Miss Lily," said Bertha Carrol, "as you have profited so much by our industry, please tell us what the beautiful locket was that the fairy gave Enna?"

"Oh, that I don't understand," answered Lily, who was literally devouring her doll with kisses to

the imminent risk of its rosy cheeks. "But I know the little fairies were real minutes; and I suppose they looked as beautiful as this dolly, only very small."

"The locket represents the day, I think," said Clara Wilder.

"Oh, yes; and the smaller stones the hours, and the little bits of ones minutes," exclaimed Norah Graham.

"It is a very pretty story; I like it much," said Jessie Lester.

"Yes," chimed in Charles Carrol;" I can understand well enough how the time slips away without one's knowing it. Go out to play ball for five minutes before you begin to study, and whew! a whole hour bounces off before you know where you are."

The children laughed at Charles's bouncing hour, and after Lily's doll had been duly admired, they hastened to remove their working materials, as Aunt Elsie made it a rule never to leave the room disordered upon retiring to rest.

The next morning the doll's wedding was celebrated with all due magnificence, and little Lily made happy by having her superb dolly, in her dress of old-fashioned silver brocade and flowing veil, the cynosure of all eyes. While Mary Parker, as she witnessed the delight which the fulfilment of her promise gave her little favorite, inwardly resolved to remember, and profit by the story of the Minute Fairies.

CHAPTER III.

What a glorious winter's day it was! The snow lay full two feet deep on a level, and was frozen so hard on the top as easily to bear up beneath your footsteps. It was very cold, though, and the sharp keen air rushed bitingly against your face as if it had awakened an appetite within itself, and was ready to devour you. Jack Frost was wide awake that day, and left his mark upon cheeks and noses; and crept behind the woollen mufflers to give your ears a friendly pinch by way of remembrance. The sun shone down on the crusted snow as bright as bright could be, and tried in vain to thaw its icy surface; but the bleak northwest wind caught up small particles of the drifted snow flakes, and flung them back into the sun's face in sport, and thus the whole air was filled with sparkling specks of ice, while the leafless branches of the trees were festooned with snow wreaths, and hung

with icicles that crackled with a clear sharp sound when the wind tossed the boughs about.

It was just the day of days for sledding, and the fine slope at the back of Aunt Elsie's was the hill of hills for that purpose. So at least thought our little party as they sallied forth after breakfast, well protected by great coats and tippets, sundry mufflers and mittens, against the cold.

The great sled that had been projected proved a failure; but there were several small ones belonging to the party, and these went merrily enough. The girls were allowed their full share in the sport, and such shouts of merry laughter as rang out on the clear frosty air, might have warmed the heart of a weary traveller.

The morning sped away rapidly, and at dinner time the hungry group did ample justice to the store of good things, which Aunt Elsie's kindness had provided for them.

"Well, we have had rare sport," cried Ernest Carrol, when they had assembled once more in the old cosy parlor, and were arranging their evening pastimes. "I don't feel in the least tired, and am willing to challenge any one to a game of snow-ball."

"I wish I was strong like you, Ernest," said little Frank Field, looking up admiringly into the

fine glowing face of the other; "I get tired so easily, and am so soon out of breath."

"Never mind, Franky," cried Harry Wilder, encouragingly; "wait until you grow a man, and see if you are not as strong as he is. No wonder you are tired, little fellow, when you would take your turn dragging up the sled with the rest, in spite of all we could say. You know we are all older, and of course stronger than you are, Frank."

Frank shook his head. "I will never be as strong as any of you," he said. "I am afraid I shall never be able to work as hard as I ought."

Little Lily came and laid her curly head on her brother's bosom, and looking up in his face, whispered:

"Wait till I grow up, Franky, and I will buy a great sled with a horse, on purpose for you."

"So we will, Lily," said Harry Wilder, anxious to change the current of Frank's thoughts, for the sensitive and delicate boy dwelt much upon the lonely situation of himself and little sister—"so we will: wouldn't it be fine to have a large sleigh big enough to accommodate us all, and a pair of horses with plenty of bells, eh?"

"Yes," chimed in his brother George; "I thought this morning it was pretty hard work dragging the

sleds up hill, just to slide down again. It was mak ing a toil of a pleasure, too much for my taste."

"Why, that is the best part of it, George," cried Charles Carrol; "I don't see that it makes much difference what you do, so as you are out in the snow."

"But I am disappointed in our great sled," said George, fretfully, "and I am tired of these little ones. I propose that we stay in doors, and try to make a large one, and let our old ones alone."

"And so lose all the fine sledding!" exclaimed Ernest: "not I, for one."

"Let well enough alone, George," said his brother Harry; "our sleds run famously, I am sure."

"Do you remember, Harry," answered his brother, "what a grand one James Grant had? that's the kind I want, these little ones seem so childish now."

"I guess you are tired, is the reason you feel so discontented, George," said his cousin Grace. "You said nothing against the sleds this morning."

George looked sulky.

"Oh," cried Lucy Parker, "George wants a large stage sleigh, with six horses and red feathers in their heads, and buffalo robes, and bear skins, with great red eyes and staring teeth, besides bells enough to deafen us, just to cause a sensation. Then we must

all jump in, with Aunt Elsie in the back seat, throned like an Indian princess: that is it, isn't it, George?"

The children all laughed, and even George smiled at this description, while Aunt Elsie said, smiling "I think I should but ill become so dignified a situ ation, as the one you have assigned me, and should need the foolscap and bells to make the picture complete."

Little Lily clapped her hands in ecstasy at the idea of Aunt Elsie in a foolscap; and good humor being restored, the controversy was dropped.

The evening had now closed in, and the curtains were let down, lights brought, and the usual employments produced. But the little party were too much fatigued to enter into any sport, and as Aunt Elsie sat knitting industriously in the corner, there were sundry whisperings, and side glances towards the bookcase, and at last little Lily, putting her rose-bud mouth close to the old lady's cheek, murmured a request. Aunt Elsie laid down her needles and smiled.

"We will put it to vote, Lily," she said. "I think you will be apt to grow sleepy if I read to you to-night."

"Oh, no, Aunt Elsie! Please read, Aunt Elsie, it is so many evenings since we had a story!" cried many voices.

"Only since the night before last," replied the old lady, kindly; "however, if you will call Dinah to bring us in some nuts and apples, and a plate of krollers, I will try and find a short story."

The refreshments were brought, the old portfolio opened, and good Aunt Elsie, putting aside her knitting work, prepared to read to the expectant group the following story, which she called

"I Have, and Oh, Had I."

In a very little, very poor and straggling town, that is not to be found on any map, and consequently whose name it is no sort of use to remember, there lived a poor weaver with two sons.

These boys, named Klem and Carl, worked at the loom, and learned their father's trade; but in such a small place there was very little to do, and the money came in but slowly to the pockets of the weaver and his sons.

When the brothers were well grown, and fully able to work without their father's assistance, the old man resolved to take a journey to a distant city, where he had some relations pretty well to do in the world, and see if he could not engage some work

from that place, while his two sons attended to the affairs at home.

The evening before the old man set out on his journey, the three were sitting together, talking over their prospects, when the father said:

"There is a certain something I have to tell you, my sons, to which you must pay great attention. You must know that in this land there is a little bird called 'I Have,' who is very tame, and easily caught, if you only go to the right place to find him. This bird is not very handsome to look at, but once catch him, and make him a fine soft nest in a warm corner, and he will lay you a golden egg every day, besides singing cheerily while you are at work. He is usually found not very far from home, and once secured, your fortune is made."

Klem and Carl were very much surprised, as well as delighted at what they heard, and expressed their determination to start off immediately in search of the wonderful bird, especially Klem, who was an unsettled fellow, and did not much like to work.

When the father saw how anxious his sons were to catch this wonderful bird, he added:

"There is another bird also, called an 'Oh, Had I,' which you must be careful not to mistake for the wonderful 'I Have.' The 'Oh, Had I' is very beautiful, with golden wings, and a breast like a rainbow,

His song is sweeter than the nightingale, and he will promise you many great things, provided you catch him, which it will seem at first very easy to do. But as no one has ever caught him yet, while many have lost themselves in pursuit of him, I advise you to have nothing to do with the alluring bird, but be content, if you can only be fortunate enough to catch an 'I Have.'"

The brothers promised faithfully to follow their father's counsel, and the next day he started from home, leaving his sons to act as they thought best in his absence.

As soon as their father was gone, the two brothers began to consult how they were to get at the wonderful 'I Have,' who was to make them happy by laying golden eggs.

Klem wanted to set out immediately in search of the treasure, but Carl, who was a prudent fellow, recommended his brother to stay at home until they had finished some work which they were fortunate enough to have on hand, reminding him that "a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush," and that it would be soon enough to set out after the work was finished. But Klem would not listen to his brother's advice. He called him a poor, mean-spirited fellow, to stay contentedly at home, working for a few shillings, while the wonderful treasure bird went perhaps

singing past the door, or was, at least, so easily caught.

"Yes," said Carl, "if you go to the right place to seek him."

"And how are we to find him, if we don't go and look after him?" replied Klem, impatiently.

Thus Klem's impatience overcame his brother's prudence; and inwardly resolving not to spend too much time in pursuit of the bird, but to return soon and finish his weaving, Carl carefully locked up the door and accompanied his brother.

They went on for some time in silence, listening attentively to every sound, and hoping to distinguish the cheerful notes of the treasure bird. Their father had given them no description by which they could distinguish it from any ordinary songster. But while Carl remembered that he had told them it was not a handsome bird, Klem, whose imagination was dazzled by the description of the "Oh, Had I," blended the two, and insisted that a bird who could lay golden eggs, must necessarily be handsome to look at.

Thus the day wore away, and as no bird had met their view, the brothers laid down and slept that night beneath the trees. Carl was awake the next morning before dawn, and aroused his brother, telling him that the birds would soon leave their nests, and they would then have a good opportunity to catch

them. Accordingly the brothers waited with ex pectancy the moment when the feathered songsters should begin their morning lays.

Presently a mingled twittering arose from the boughs, and forth from among the dew-laden leaves fluttered the little minstrels, tuning their piping throats for their morning song.

The brothers were each provided with a net, which they carefully spread, and caught very many birds therein. But upon examining them, they found them all ordinary birds, common to the country, whose eggs, though plentiful, were never yet known to be golden. It was clear that the wonderful "I Have" was not among them, and so they liberated the little prisoners.

Several days passed in this manner, without success, and Carl reminded his brother of his father's words, that the "I Have" was generally found near home, while they had wandered many miles away, and proposed returning to their work, and setting out at a more favorable season, as perhaps the treasure bird did not fly at that time of year.

But Klem was determined to persevere; he told Carl to go home if he pleased, but he would not return without the wonderful bird. He blamed his brother for being so easily discouraged, and prophesied that he

would be nothing but a poor weaver to the end of his days.

While they were thus arguing, a burst of rich melody startled them, and looking up, they beheld a superb bird sitting on the topmost branch of a tall tree, and singing melodiously, while his plumage flashed in the sunlight in a thousand shades of the most brilliant colors.

The brothers' hearts beat fast; this was assuredly the treasure bird, as they had never seen any thing like it before, and they endeavored to spread their nets so as to entrap it. But the bright bird was wary; he bent his graceful wings and floated almost within the brothers' reach, and perched himself on a low branch, looking on them with his bright eyes most knowingly; then, when they were sure they had him, he would elude their grasp, and soaring away to another tree, pour forth such a gush of melody as inspired new ardor in his pursuit.

Almost insensibly, the brothers were led on after the bewildering bird, who constantly deluded them with the hope of catching him, and as constantly escaped.

When Carl saw how impossible it was to entrap the fascinating bird, he remembered his father's warning, and became convinced that it was the deceptive "Oh, Had I" that they were pursuing. He told his

brother what he thought, and advised him to abandon so hopeless a chase; but Klem would not listen to a word he said, especially as, just at that moment, the bewitching bird perched on his shoulder, and Klem was certain he distinguished these words in his song:

"Follow me, follow me,
Catch me, and cage me;
Carl can go home if he please:
While he starves and begs,
I will lay golden eggs,
And, Klem, you can sit at your ease."

Klem cast a triumphant look at his brother, and rushed with outspread hands after the songster, who had soared off to a neighboring bush; while Carl, more convinced than ever that his brother was pursuing a deceptive "Oh, Had I," shook his head resolutely, and, bidding him farewell, turned his steps towards home.

As Carl went homewards, he turned to look after his brother, and shouted to him to return; but Klem would not listen, and Carl soon lost sight of him in the distance.

When Carl arrived at home, he went immediately to work, resolved to banish all thoughts of the treasure bird, at least for the present. He had enough weaving to keep him employed many days, now that

his brother was not with him to assist; and he worked away late and early, anxious to accomplish his task.

When the neighbors heard the steady click of Carl's loom, all the day long, and far into the night, they thought "what a steady industrious fellow is Carl the weaver;" and forthwith one told the other, and all seemed more eager than ever to give him employment. His work was well and punctually done; people began to remark on it, and thus work came in more plentifully; Carl was kept busy, and had no time to go in search of the wonderful "I Have." His wants were simple, and daily a little was laid by, Carl thinking to atone in a measure to his father for not obtaining the wonderful treasure bird.

One fine summer morning Carl was singing at his work, by the open window, when suddenly he heard a sweet trilling melody, close at his ear; and there, perched on the end of his loom, sat a tiny brown bird, with bright black eyes, singing away in the merriest and most sociable manner imaginable. It looked very like the little ordinary forest birds that become tame by seeing mankind, and often fly down by a doorway to pick up the crumbs.

Carl was pleased with the familiar air of his little visitor, and held out his hand, saying, "You are a sociable little fellow; come here and sing me another song if it please you."

To his great surprise and delight, the little bird obeyed the summons, and seating himself on Carl's hand, trolled forth a merry roundelay in a manner so irresistibly comic, and with so many trills and quavers, that Carl was perfectly delighted; and when the little warbler paused in his song, and flew away to the window-seat, Carl hastened to spread crumbs for him, hoping to entice him to stay. The little bird picked up the crumbs, and hovered round the open window all day, cheering Carl with his lively songs, and in the evening, after the weaver had finished his work, he carefully made a soft, warm nest, and placed it upon one of the beams near the window, at the same time chirping to his little singing friend, and inviting him to enter.

The bird seemed to understand Carl's invitation, and soon took possession of his comfortable quarters. After this the little brown bird became Carl's constant guest; all day long cheering him with his merry and delightful melody, and eating the crumbs out of his hand, perching on his shoulder, and exhibiting the utmost fondness for him.

"I don't believe there are any golden eggs in your nest, my little friend," said Carl one day to his bird, "for I have seen plenty of your kind before; but I wouldn't exchange your pleasant company and sweet voice for any 'I Have' in the land."

The little brown bird flew up into its nest at this, and there burst forth in such a gush of trillings and quaverings, that Carl was fain to put up his hand to his head while he said, laughing:

"Well, well, I don't mean to disturb your nest, my little fellow; I earn enough at my trade for us both, and I think, when my father sees my little hoard, and hears your pleasant voice, he will not regret the 'I Have.' I wish poor Klem would come home again, and we could all be happy together."

Months had passed away, and no tidings had been heard of Klem, when one evening, as Carl was sitting at his door, he espied his father coming down the road. He hastened to him, and a joyful meeting it was, you may be certain.

"I have got plenty of work, Carl," said his father, after they were seated within, "for the fame of your industry has reached even the great city where I have been, and we need never be idle again for want of employment."

Carl then told his father the adventures of Klem and himself. The old man was very much depressed at the news. It was an "Oh, Had I" that had beguiled Klem, and he feared he would never give up the chase.

"Yes, poor Klem would not take my counsel," replied Carl, sadly; "but I have a dear little bird here

that keeps me good company, and I do not pine after the wonderful "I Have."

As he spoke, the little brown bird jumped up on the edge of the nest, and sung a merry lay, in which, to his great wonderment, Carl plainly distinguished these words:—

"The nest will soon break
I have filled for your sake,
Then build me another,
As soft as the other,
And through the long day
While you're working away,
You never shall weary,
While I sing you be cheery, be cheery."

The last words, "be cheery," were trolled out in every variety of note, and as the lingering cadence died away, a shower of golden eggs came tumbling down upon Carl's loom; the little brown bird sang away louder than ever, and Carl stood with uplifted hands and eyes, while his father picked up the gold.

You may be sure that the wonderful little "I Have" had a soft, warm nest prepared in a very short time, and so comfortable did he find his quarters, that he lived with Carl all his life; and when the weaver died at an advanced age, the little brown bird sang a strain of triumphant melody as he soared upwards, as though he would fain express that his good friend

Carl had laid up never-failing riches above. Thus the wonderful "I Have" made Carl rich and contented during his life, and happy in death; but as for poor Klem, nothing more was ever heard of him, and for aught we know, he may be chasing the deceptive "Oh, Had I" even until now.

"Is that all!" exclaimed the children, as Aunt Elsie closed the manuscript.

"Yes," replied the old lady; "I read you a short story this time, because you are sleepy and tired."

"Oh no, we are not, indeed; the story was a great deal too short," cried many voices.

"Be cheery, be cheery," screamed little Lily; "I am the little brown bird, and will coax another golden story from Aunt Elsie to-morrow night."

The children all laughed, and Bertha Carrol said: "True, Lily, I think we are making poor application of Aunt Elsie's beautiful story, not to be contented with the 'I Have,' but still longing after an 'Oh, Had I.'"

"You mean a longer story," said Norah Graham; "it was too pretty to be so short. I wish Aunt Elsie had spun it out."

"It sounds like a German story," said Harry Wilder; "and the 'I Have' personifies Content, of course."

"It is taken from a German fancy," replied Aunt Elsie; "they say there are two such little birds in the land, and they call them 'Habtch and Hattch.'"

"Droll names enough," laughed Ernest; "but I like the story much. "After this my motto shall be, 'Contentment is great riches."

"I wonder what became of Klem," said Frank Field, musingly; "it seems so natural to be ever striving after the bright and unattainable, that I do not wonder at his choice."

"Take care, Frank, don't get bewitched by an 'Oh, Had I,' I beseech you," cried Harry, "particularly with such a sweet little 'I Have' ever near you;'" and he pointed towards Lily.

Aunt Elsie gave an approving smile to Harry Wilder. She knew Frank's sensitive, dreamy, poetical nature was illy fitted to encounter the hardships of his destiny, and she saw that Harry Wilder understood him thoroughly, and strove to strengthen and cheer him, with his hearty common sense.

George had sat musingly apart, but he now approached Aunt Elsie with a pencil and paper in his hand. "Will you please tell me how to spell those German words?" he said.

Aunt Elsie complied, and George wrote them down.

"And what use are you going to make of 'Habtch and Hattch,' may I ask?" questioned Aunt Elsie, kindly.

"I am going to paint the 'Habtch' on my sled," replied George, frankly, "to remind me always to be content with 'I Have,' and let 'Oh, Had I' alone."

Aunt Elsie placed her hand approvingly on the boy's shoulder, and Lucy Parker exclaimed:

"Farewell, bright visions of six horses, red feathers, and bear skins; Aunt Elsie can never be an Indian princess, or wear the cap and bells. The 'Oh, Had I' has vanished in the distance, and hereafter we must be contented to slide down hill on an insignificant 'I Have.'"

"'I Have' is a great possession," cried Willie Graham, with his mouth full, "for *I have* a fine brown kroller, and oh had I some nuts, I should want nothing more," he added, as Lily caught up the basket of nuts and ran across the room, exclaiming:

"Fellow them, follow them,
Catch them, and crack them."

The whole party joined in the chase, amid laughing and singing, and after obtaining the wished-for

prize, the children regaled themselves, and in due time were snugly tucked away in bed, to dream of "I Haves" and "Oh, Had Is."

CHAPTER IV.

"A STORY! a story!" cried a dozen merry voices, as Aunt Elsie joined the little group on the following evening. "A long story this time, if you please, and let it be just as pretty as the one of the little brown bird."

Aunt Elsie made her way good-naturedly amidst the group of petitioners, some of whom were clinging around her, whilst others arranged the lights, and placed the footstool; and little Lily officiously climbed up on a chair, to unlock the old bookcase.

"Patience, patience, my little people," said the old lady, as she witnessed their busy arrangements. "You have profited but little, I fear, from my lesson on the merits of Slow and Sure; you are patterning after Klem now, and tumbling head over heels after 'Oh, Had I.'"

The children loudly denied Aunt Elsie's accusa-

tion; and as they seated themselves around the table Frank Field said:

"I have been thinking that perhaps it is not right, after all, to be contented with things just as they are, for then we would never be anxious for improvement."

"True, Frank," answered Harry Wilder. "Suppose our ancestors had been satisfied with their clumsy implements, and slow coaches, where would now have been our machinery and railroads?"

"Your inferences are wrong," said Aunt Elsie. "The spirits of discontent, and of eager inquiry after knowledge, are entirely dissimilar. While we are taught to be content in whatever situation we are placed, yet we are nowhere forbidden to improve it by every lawful exertion; at the same time, it is wise not to forsake a real good for a fancied benefit, and like Klem, overlook the 'I Have,' in our pursuit of 'Oh, Had I.' I never yet knew a discontented person who achieved any great end, while one who is constantly improving, is content, simply because he is progressing towards ultimate perfection."

"That is the true way to be contented and happy," said Ernest; "to keep one's self always busy. Father says it is only stagnant water that becomes impure—rapid streams are always clear and healthy."

"I wonder," said Frank, musingly, "whether any

one was ever contented; it seems to me every one wishes for something that he has not!"

"Yes," added May Lester, "and when they obtain the coveted prize, it becomes almost valueless to them, and they sigh for something more."

"If it were not for this feeling there would be no such thing as hope, and we would never be happy without hope, you know," replied Grace.

"I remember reading a story somewhere," said George, "of a gentleman who posted a bill upon his house, stating that the place would be given to any person who was perfectly contented, and when any one applied to him, he asked them, 'Are you perfectly content?' When they answered, 'Yes,' he asked, 'Then what do you want with my house?'"

The children laughed, and Harry remarked:

"He must have been rather a cynical philosopher, for he enjoyed the pleasure of disappointing, and ridiculing others, while he kept his property safe."

"He was a very selfish man, at any rate," remarked Clara, "and cruel besides, to excite expectations he never meant to fulfil."

"I have often noticed," said Frank, "how many people seem to think themselves worse off than any one else, when they have a great deal more than most folks to make them happy. It is strange that they see every one else's good, and only their own evil."

Aunt Elsie looked fondly, yet sadly, on the little boy as she answered, smiling kindly on him:

"Take care, my dear Frank, that *you* do not become one of those who wilfully stand in the shade of their own path, and grumble at the sunlight that falls upon that of another. We must ever strive to remember, that whatever troubles or trials befall us, they are directed by a never erring Providence, who ordains for us those burdens we are most able to bear, and if we were to exchange places with those whose lot seems enviable, we would find it accompanied by some sorrow, for which we were entirely unfitted."

"That reminds me of the 'Mountain of Miseries,' I think it is written by Addison, in which every one is allowed to exchange miseries with his neighbor, and after a trial each person is glad to take up his own again," said Bertha.

"Yes, I remember that," cried Lucy Parker, "and the description of the tall man exchanging his long legs for a pair of short ones, made me laugh enough. But now you have all been talking so sensibly that I dare not put in a word edgewise, and I am afraid the evening will be spent without Aunt Elsie's promised story; so, ladies and gentlemen, will you be content to finish your conversation on another occa-

sion, and enjoy the present good contained in yonder old bookcase?"

The younger children warmly seconded Lucy's proposition, and after a little more talking, the group settled quietly down, like a swarm of bees, and the old portfolio being produced, Aunt Elsie selected a manuscript, which she said had some bearing upon their conversation, and prepared to read. Little Lily petitioned that the story should be a long one, as she was not at all sleepy. Norah polished Aunt Elsie's glasses, and Jessie shaded the light to suit the old lady's eyes; and thus, all being in readiness, the little folks listened attentively to the story of

The Lump, and the Long Nose.

Once upon a time, no matter when—in a large city, situated no matter where—since if I were to tell you both time and place, it is not at all likely you would take a long journey to the city, and search its archives, to assure yourself of the truth of these wonderful events I am about to relate. Suffice it to say, on the veracity of a chronicler, that the story is as true as though the man in the moon had told it himself; therefore, be satisfied to learn, that in a cer-

tain city, at a certain time, lived two neighbors who were united in the strictest bonds of friendship and sympathy, each being equally poor, and equally afflicted.

Andreas, the porter, was blest with a nose so enormously large as to cast a shadow almost as long as himself, so that he was obliged to be very careful, lest in turning the corners of the streets he should give his poor nose an unlucky blow. And the pedestrians, when they saw a long shadow creeping on the pavement, always stepped aside, saying with contemptuous pity, "Here comes Andreas, the porter, who carries his greatest burden between his eyes and chin."

Besides being the possessor of so unusual a nose, poor Andreas had taken on himself another trouble, in the shape of a scolding wife; who, although she never failed to leave a nicely prepared supper and clean hearth, ready for Andreas on his return home, yet always seasoned his food with so many gibes and cross words, and scolded so unceasingly if her unlucky husband left a foot-print on the bright hearthstone, that the tired porter would have been better contented to go supperless and cold to his bed, rather than to be fed and warmed at the expense of his quiet, to say nothing of an occasional tweak at the ungainly nose, that, as the wife too truly said, "was continually poking itself where it was not wanted,"

and she might also have added, "where its unfortunate owner had no idea it was going."

On these melancholy occasions, the only comfort of the unlucky porter was to take his pipe and step into his neighbor Casper's house, sure of his sympathy and condolence. Casper, the cobbler, considered himself the most afflicted of mortals, for he was doomed to carry upon his back an enormous hump, larger than any package which his friend, the porter, had ever been known to lift. As he sat all the day pulling out his waxed thread, with his clamps between his knees, the smell of neighbor Andreas' savory supper came refreshingly to his nostrils, and he envied him the wife who could prepare his food so seasonably.

By this you may know that Casper was a miserable bachelor, who was obliged to boil his own coffee, and attend to his own affairs, since not a woman in the country could be found willing to share the home and poverty of the humpbacked cobbler.

This was the only subject upon which the friends ever contended, each insisting upon the superior ills of his individual situation, and declaring that he alone was the most afflicted and miserable creature on the face of the earth.

To Andreas the hump of his friend seemed only a package, never laid down, and he preferred the thick

coffee and dirty hearth, to his own tidy home, with the ceaseless accompaniment of a scolding wife; while Casper considered the enormous nose of his friend the porter, as a mere trifle, compared to his everlasting burden, and thought the warm hearth and good suppers cheaply bought at the expense of a little quiet.

While affairs were in this condition, the friends strolled out one evening after their work was done, to indulge in the comfort of reciprocal sympathy. It had been an unlucky day for poor Andreas; his unfortunate nose had met with several severe knocks, and his tidy wife was tidier, and in consequence, crosser than ever. Andreas felt very unhappy; he was quite sure that he was the most miserable man alive, and so he told his friend.

Casper, on his part, insisted that his misfortunes exceeded his friend's tenfold, inasmuch that there was none who thought enough of him, even to give him a scolding now and then. The dispute waxed warmer, until the two friends became really angry, and the argument seemed likely to end in blows, when Casper, who was just about shaking his clenched hand at the porter, started back in affright, for there, comfortably seated on Andreas' nose, and thumping his heels against its sides as though it were a horse, appeared the drollest little figure imaginable.

He was not higher than a finger, and united in his own tiny figure the deformities of each of the combatants; his nose being as long as his legs, and the hump upon his back nearly the size of his whole body.

This comical little figure wore a red cap with a long tassel, and his small black eyes twinkled merrily beneath a mass of foxy-looking hair.

When he saw that Casper had observed him, he sprang nimbly off the porter's nose and swung himself on the branch of a tree that grew near, then seating himself on the extreme end of the bough, commenced laughing immoderately, to the no small wonderment of the friends, who knew not what to think of this strange intruder. After a few seconds he recovered from his fit of merriment, and exclaimed, in a shrill voice.

"How now, what child's play is this? Are ye so jealous of each other's beauty that ye must needs come to blows about it?"

This speech increased the astonishment of the two, and the dwarf, seeing their looks of frightened surprise, again addressed them.

"Come, come, my friends," said he, in a good-natured tone, "never be afraid of one so much like yourselves, seeing that I might pass for the brother of either; I mean you no harm; tell me the cause of

your quarrel, and who knows but I may settle it to the satisfaction of both ?"

Hearing this reasonable address and kind offer, the friends took courage, and Casper, who (by reason, perhaps, of never having a wife) possessed more bravery than his comrade, told the dwarf the story of their respective infirmities, and the quarrel that had arisen therefrom.

You may be sure he painted his own troubles in the strongest colors, and spoke slightingly of the porter's trials; but Andreas interrupted him, exclaiming loudly, that the cobbler was a prince beside him, and never was a poor mortal so afflicted as himself.

To all this loud and angry talking the dwarf made no answer but by immoderate peals of laughter, and the two disputants becoming enraged at his ill-timed mirth, turned to quit the spot, when the dwarf exclaimed,

"Stay, my worthy fellows, you must not wonder at my laughing that you should be so anxious to get rid of what I consider great ornaments. I suppose now *you* would call me deformed. I assure you I am considered the handsomest courtier in her fairy majesty's dominions. But since, like foolish, short-sighted mortals, you are not satisfied with your condition, what say you to an exchange? Andreas shall carry

the hump, and Casper take the long nose and scolding wife."

"With all my heart," cried the porter, joyfully, "and never have I shouldered a burden so readily."

"The smell of your suppers is very savory," replied the cobbler, "and for their sakes I am well content to take both nose and wife, in the bargain."

"Are you agreed, then?" asked the dwarf.

"That we are," cried both; "but how is this happy exchange to be brought about?"

"Trust that to me," answered their new benefactor. "All you have to do, is to take each a lozenge out of the box I will give you, lay it on your tongue, and go home as usual, Andreas to the cobbler's house, and Casper to the home of the porter. Then, however it may seem to yourselves, to others it will appear that you have completely changed persons. Keep your own counsel, and Casper, beware how you trust your new wife with your secret."

The dwarf thought he had made a fine joke at this, and fell again into a violent fit of laughter; but suddenly checking himself, he said:

"As I foresee, you will desire some other change ere long, I will grant you two other wishes, on condition that they are made by both at the same moment. See here," and as he spoke, he pulled two

strands out of his cap tassel and knotted them firmly on a high branch; "whenever you agree to wish for the same thing at the same moment, come to this tree, and with your united strength break off one of these threads: your wish will then be accomplished."

The two friends were highly delighted at this promise, and after repeatedly thanking the dwarf, who sat grinning among the leaves, they each accepted the lozenge that he offered, and carefully marking the particular tree on which hung the charmed threads, hurried gayly on, anxious to test the truth of the dwarf's promise.

It must be confessed that Andreas crept timidly past his open door, fearing that his wife would recognize him, and call him in; while Casper stood tremblingly on the threshold, watching the preparations for supper, and inhaling its savory odor, doubtful whether he should enter. Presently the porter's wife looked up, and seeing Casper peering in at the door, exclaimed in an angry tone:

"What are you standing gaping at, ye lazy lout? here is the meat burnt to a crisp, waiting your snail's pace: must I e'en take hold of that long nose of thine, and drag ye in to supper?"

This speech, though it startled Casper, convinced him that he bore his friend's likeness, and so, pluck-

ing up courage, he marched in and seated himself at the table, without speaking a word. Owing to the strangeness of his new position, and the fear of doing something that would reveal his wonderful secret, poor Casper did many awkward things, spilling the salt, upsetting his cup, breaking the saucer, and pouring the hot coffee over the nicely-sanded floor. These things called down a volley of wrath from the tidy wife, who spared neither gibe nor hard word in her rage. Casper thought the best way to keep peace, was to keep silent; and so managed to eat a very hearty supper despite the "peppering" of his shrewish companion. After supper the wife bade him, in no very gentle terms, to shoulder a large parcel that laid upon the floor, and carry it up to the loft; but so awkwardly did the unlucky Casper fulfil her commands, that the pack tumbled off his back, and a loud crash betrayed the ruin he had occasioned, as the bundle contained several necessary articles of housekeeping that the thoughtful housewife had just purchased.

Here was a catastrophe! never before was a poor man so assailed and abused. Catching the unfortunate wight by the nose, she swung him round like a cat, venting at the same time all manner of railing beside many blows upon his devoted head,

and concluding her scolding by telling her victim to go to his friend the cobbler and learn to stitch leather, since he was fit for nothing else.

As Casper crept stealthily to the door, after escaping her grasp, he saw the porter looking warily in at the window, evidently rejoicing that he was liberated from this thraldom, and enjoying the scene before him.

Casper hastened to join his friend. Andreas chuckled mightily over the poor cobbler, and declared the dirty hearth, and muddy coffee, to be the most delightful things in existence, enlivened by the *distant* sound of his shrewish spouse's voice. While Casper, now partially recovered from his bruises and fright, declared himself perfectly willing to pay the penalty in consideration of the hearty meal he had enjoyed.

After a long conversation on the wonderful events of the day, Casper carried his clamps into his new home, glad to avail himself of the shrew's permission to work at his trade; while Andreas, who was ignorant of shoemaking, was happy to proceed in his old vocation. They parted with mutual self congratulations and great anticipations of comfort.

Many were the jeers and scoffs that Casper was doomed to bear, when on the following morning he

seated himself at work, in leather apron, and with clamps between his knees.

"A fine work *ye* will make with tacking and threading; all the gentry will come to you with their shoes, to a certainty. We'll be rich enough now, I trow" These, and sundry other remarks, were poured into the poor cobbler's ears, as he commenced his task.

But he found full soon that he had "reckoned without his host," as the saying is, when he took up his trade, for the long nose was terribly in the way, and received so many stabs from the awl, and knocks with the hammer, that he was fain to lay aside his work before the day was over, amid the renewed jeering of the shrew.

A good dinner comforted him in his afflictions, and he determined to await the appearance of his friend, and consult what was best to be done. In a short time the poor porter came toiling up the street, tired and worn. He beckoned to Casper as he passed, and went in his new home, where the cobbler soon joined him.

"This will never do, my friend," cried Andreas throwing himself upon a seat as he spoke. "This confounded hump is burden enough without shouldering any other. I cannot carry half as much as I

did formerly, and am tired to death, without having earned enough to buy my supper."

"My case is equally cruel, I assure you," returned the other; "since I find it impossible to draw out my awl without stabbing this unfortunate nose, that I so foolishly borrowed of you, besides being forced to bear all the abuse of your delightful wife.

At this the porter burst into a laugh, as he replied: "It was droll enough to hear my old customers asking where I had gone to; and great was their astonishment when I told them we had exchanged callings. I said not a word about the other change, of that you may be sure."

"But what is to be done?" asked Casper, dolefully; "we will both starve at this rate, as neither can work as we used to do. Had we not better go to the wishing-tree, and wish for some employment that will gain us a livelihood?"

"No," said Andreas, thoughtfully, "I think not; we might wish for something better than that. I have it! Let us wish for wealth, riches unbounded, and no work. What say you to that, my friend?"

"Agreed, with all my heart!" cried the other joyfully; "and let us go this moment. What a happy thought of yours that was, eh, Andreas."

Without wasting any more time in talking, the two hurried forward to the wishing-tree, and having

found the threads, gave a hard pull together; the string snapped, and just then they heard the merry, mocking laugh of the dwarf, but could see no one.

Upon returning home, Casper found his scolding mate very busily engaged opening a large chest that stood on the table, while another, still larger, was placed near the door. Upon seeing her supposed husband, she exclaimed:

"Come hither ye lumbering lout, and open this chest, can ye; ye don't deserve the good luck that has befallen you, I am sure. There!" she cried, as Casper succeeded in forcing the lid—"there! look at that, ye scape-grace, and bless your stars that sent me to be a wife to ye."

As she spoke, she lifted out a handful of gold pieces, and spread them on the table before the astonished Casper.

"Where—where, did this come from?" he gasped forth at last, overpowered by the sudden accomplishment of his wish.

"Why, from one of my relations, to be sure. He died and left me all his gold. There, read that," and she tossed a letter towards him.

Poor Casper scarcely knew whether he stood on his head or heels, at this unexpected sight; but after helping the dame (whom the gold had put in

unwonted good-humor) to secrete the prize, he hast ened to tell Andreas the wonderful news.

Upon arriving at his friend's, he was surprised to find the door carefully barred. After knocking sev eral times very loudly, he saw Andreas peer cautiously out of the window, and upon seeing Casper, he hastened to open the door just wide enough to admit his wondering friend. After carefully refastening it, Andreas mysteriously led the cobbler into the room, and there, displayed upon the floor, was a sight that renewed Casper's astonishment. Twelve large pots stood side by side, each uncovered, and heaped to the brim with shining gold. As Casper stooped to examine it, the porter told him, how, when he went to boil his coffee, upon his return home, the pot constantly upset, the hearth was so broken and uneven, and when he became impatient, and raised up the hearth-stone, to endeavor to place it evenly, these twelve pots of gold met his astonished gaze. He then cautiously barred the door for fear of interruption, and proceeded to take the treasure from its hiding-place, when the coming of his friend disturbed him.

This was the wonderful tale that Andreas related to the cobbler, who in return, recounted his wonderful accession of fortune, through his wife's relative.

Both were of course convinced of the dwarf's

agency in this matter, and parted at last to devise schemes of enjoying their newly acquired treasures.

Before long, a fine house appeared upon the spot where the miserable hut of the supposed Andreas lately stood; a handsome garden, full of beautiful trees and flowers surrounded it, and the shrewish lady of the mansion, decked in the gayest ornaments, went about telling every one how fortunate her husband was in having her for a wife.

Casper, meanwhile, though dressed in fine clothing, and living sumptuously every day, was far from happy. The dame continually tormented and taunted him with his dependence on her, and bewailed her sad fate in being united to such a fright with his enormous nose.

"If it were only a hump now, like our neighbor the cobbler's, one might cover it with a velvet cloak," she would say, "but this horrible nose, it constantly casts a shadow on the path of my enjoyment."

In society, Capser found his unfortunate nose a subject of never-ceasing merriment; and this, with his spouse's continual bickering, wasted him away to a shadow, despite his good fare.

He constantly reproached himself for exchanging conditions with Andreas. "Had I staid as I was, he would say to himself, "I should have found the pots of gold and enjoyed them without any thanks to

this abominable woman;" and so he fretted away his time.

Andreas, on his part, was afraid to spend any thing in building a fine house; he had a continual dread of losing his beloved gold, and spent all his days counting it over, to be certain not a piece was lost. He denied himself food and drink; his money was his existence: at night he could not sleep for fear of robbers, and during the day gloated over his treasure, thus growing more miserable and miserly every day his life wore on.

One night, Andreas the miser fell into a deep but troubled slumber, and on awaking, his first thought was of his darling treasure. He hastened to the spot where it was buried, when lo! two of the pots were gone; only ten remained! Almost distracted, he counted them over and over again: there were ten and no more. The truth burst on him; he had been robbed, plundered while he slept! Maddened at his loss, he rushed into the house of his neighbor Casper, whom he found striding up and down his splendid apartments, looking as miserable and troubled as himself.

"Oh, Casper, Casper!" cried the forlorn miser, "I am ruined, my treasure is stolen; let us away to the wishing-tree, that I may recover my lost pots of gold."

"To the wishing-tree," cried Casper, starting;

"yes, with all my heart." And without farther explanation off they started.

Arrived at the wishing-tree, the charmed thread was easily found; and Andreas, grasping one end, pulled with all his might, exclaiming, "My treasure-pots; oh, restore my treasure-pots!" while Casper, tugging away at the other end of the thread, cried,

"I wish to be released from Andreas' shrewish wife and his long nose!"

Thus each pulled and wished, but the string remained unbroken until Andreas exclaimed despairingly,

"What are you saying there, Casper? Wish with me, that my two pots of gold may be restored."

"Your pots of gold, indeed!" retorted the other disdainfully; "you have plenty without them; rather wish with me, that I may be rid of the torments of my life, that properly belong to you."

"To me, do you say?" cried the miser, angrily. "Did we not fairly exchange, and have I not this intolerable hump to constantly remind me of my folly?"

"*Your* folly! say mine rather," returned the cobbler. "Have I not taken two burdens off your shoulders for the one I have put on? But I tell you, you are a fool to grieve after two pots when you have ten left; so come wish with me."

"Never," cried Andreas, now thoroughly enraged,

"I would rather, ten times, have my wife and long nose again, than to yield one inch to you."

"Done," cried Casper, quickly, "and I wish you would restore my hump!"

Even as they spoke, the thread snapped in their fingers; a low mocking laugh rang out upon the air, and the two disputants found themselves seated upon the greensward, each rejoicing in his own peculiar deformity. For a few seconds they looked at each other in a state of great bewilderment; then Andreas gravely gave his nose a sudden tweak, to be sure of his own identity, while Casper rubbed his hump against a tree, to be certain that he carried his burden still.

Each thought he had been dreaming; but as one related his dream to the other, they were struck with their exact coincidence in events. So, puzzled and thoughtful, they wended their way homeward, expecting there to find some solution of the mystery.

Arrived at their homes, every thing wore its old accustomed look. The poor hovel of Andreas and the dirty hut of Casper stood side by side as of yore; no vestige of the fine house and garden remained; but through the open casement came the savory smell of the porter's supper, and his wife wore no traces of her finery.

They had gone out, just before sunset, on their accustomed walk; it was now evening; the towns-

folk passed and repassed as usual; no remarks were made as to their absence, or of any unusual occurrence having taken place.

Andreas and Casper stood thoughtfully together, when, to their great surprise, the porter's wife came out, and remarking that they both looked weary, invited the cobbler to share their evening meal. This unexpected event convinced the friends that they were still bewitched; and during supper, Andreas, encouraged by his wife's wondrous kindness, related their adventures. She was very much surprised, you may be sure; but said she too had fallen asleep on their departure, and it seemed but a short time since they left home.

Thus strangely bewildered, the three sat around the table, when Andreas's wife, who had some sense as well as temper, spoke. She advised them not to mention their visions to any person, as, whether it really happened or not, they had each profited by the lesson; for her part, she would try and curb her temper, and Casper should live comfortably with them, while they should always remember that "Our wishes are not always our good."

Whether some good spirit had been busy with them, or whether it took the combined influence of both friends to soften dame Andreas's temper, cannot be known; but certain it is, that ever after the three

lived in perfect harmony and peace, until, "As contented as Casper and Andreas" became a proverb in the town.

Aunt Elsie closed the manuscript.

"I think my story was long enough, even for Lily," she said, looking at her watch; "it is now bedtime."

"It was a droll story enough," cried Ernest, "and I did not think it long."

"Nor I, nor I," cried each voice, as they rose from their seats, and prepared to put aside their several employments.

"Its moral is, that, to be contented, is to be happy, is it not?" said Grace.

"Yes," cried Lucy Parker, "and no matter how ugly I grow, I shall never fret, even if my nose should rival that of Andreas the porter."

"I think he had the worst of it," said Harry, "with both nose and wife to trouble him. Casper was a simpleton to exchange."

"Now, Harry, you will certainly be a crabbed old bachelor," laughed Charles. "I will argue that point with you."

"A truce to all arguments to-night, my young people," said Aunt Elsie, rising; "I would rather

see bright eyes in the morning, than hear bright speeches to-night; we have overstaid our usual hour."

The argument was therefore indefinitely postponed, and in a few moments, the little group had quietly dispersed to their several apartments.

CHAPTER V.

"It is dead, quite dead, I fear," said Jessie Lester, sadly, to her sister May, as they entered the room one very cold morning, after their return from a walk.

May put aside her fur tippet, and looked tenderly down on the little bird that she was endeavoring to warm in her bosom. It was a robin, that the sisters had found apparently frozen and lifeless on the snow, and had carried home with them, hoping to restore it to life.

May laid the stiffened songster against her rosy cheek, and folded it gently in her hands, as she answered:

"It feels warmer now, Jessie; I hope it is not dead. If you will untie my bonnet, sister, I will wrap the dear little thing in my fur tippet, and warm it near the fire."

Jessie did as May desired, and the sisters knelt

on the hearth, and making a nest of the fur tippet, laid the apparently lifeless bird within it, and watched it with tender interest.

"What have you there, my children?" asked the kind voice of Aunt Elsie, who had entered unnoticed by them, and was now looking over their shoulders.

The story of the frozen robin was soon told, and Aunt Elsie, smiling kindly, advised them to get a small covered basket, and after putting some soft wool or cotton in it, to stand it in a warm corner, not too near the fire, as she did not think the fur tippet would be at all improved by its present use.

The basket was soon procured, and as May lifted the bird and tenderly placed it within, she was sure she felt its little heart beat faintly in its breast.

The children had all returned from their walks by this time, and many were the anxious peeps into the covered basket, despite Aunt Elsie's repeated injunctions that it should not be disturbed.

Before long a faint fluttering was heard in the basket, and on May lifting the cover, the robin hopped out upon the floor. He was weak enough, poor little fellow, and seemed unable to stand, while one wing dragged on the ground as if it were hurt.

At a word from Aunt Elsie, little Lily flew off for some bread crumbs, which were softly scattered on the hearth so as not to alarm the little stranger, and

then the children concealed themselves behind the window curtains, or sat perfectly quiet in the far corners of the room, watching intently the motions of the redbreast. He seemed frightened and bewildered at first, but gradually gaining confidence, as he found all still about him, ventured to pick up the crumbs, hopping around with increased spryness, and lifting up his head and winking his bright eyes, to the great delight of his attentive audience.

Little Lily could scarcely contain her delight, as growing bolder, he hopped upon the ottomans and chairs, and seemed to become familiar in his new home.

"Little bird with bosom red,
Welcome to my humble shed,"

cried Lily, as the robin hopped on the sofa near the window, where she stood.

"Daily round my table steal,
While I pick my scanty meal,"

added Lucy Parker, holding forth both hands full of dough-nuts.

The children's merry laugh startled the little fellow at first; but as they gradually crept out from their hiding-places, and scattered crumbs before him, he became quite tame, to the no small delight of his new

friends, and the imminent danger of Aunt Elsie's carpet, from cake and bread crumbs every where showered upon it.

With instinctive gratitude, the robin seemed to attach himself to May Lester, and ventured after a while to perch upon her hand, and eat the crumbs that Jessie offered him. Never was king on his throne more waited upon and followed than this little robin redbreast. After he had quite recovered, a consultation arose as to what should be done with the new favorite. Some thought it cruel to cage him; others opposed his going out into the snow lest he should freeze to death, as his wing was found to be hurt, so as to disable him from flying far.

It was finally concluded to keep him that day, as he seemed so well contented in his new home, and to open a window on the following morning, giving him an opportunity to escape, if he liked. This point being settled, the children amused themselves nearly all day watching and feeding the feathered favorite. He showed no inclination to sleep when the lights were first brought in, and it was not until, having found a dark corner, he perched himself on the top of the old bookcase, with his head under his wing, that the children grouped themselves around the table, and begged Aunt Elsie for another story.

Aunt Elsie good-naturedly put aside her work

and complied with their request, by reading the following story of

The Lily Fairy, and the Silver Beam.

Every one in the village loved little Florette, and what wonder, when she was so gentle and so good? Not only all the villagers, but even the dumb animals loved her, and felt pleasure at her approach. The little court-yard in front of her grandmother's cottage at the end of the lane, was crowded every morning with robins and swallows, who waited the coming of Florette to give them their breakfast, and who, after satisfying their hunger with the crumbs that she scattered plentifully before them, flew off to the neighboring trees and sang a sweet chorus of thanks.

Florette lived quite alone with her aged grandmother, and was the old lady's sole nurse and companion. Never was there a more faithful and patient attendant; always cheerful, willing, and happiest when most employed. No wonder her grandmother loved her child better than all the world beside.

Little Florette went out into the shady woods, early one lovely summer morning. She had risen

softly so as not to disturb her grandmother who was fast asleep, and after carefully drawing the muslin curtain, and closing the shutters, to shade the light from the sleeper's eyes, tripped lightly down stairs and out into the garden, to gather a fresh bouquet of fragrant flowers to adorn the breakfast table.

It was yet very early, the grass bent beneath the weight of the dew-drops, and the bright sun was just peeping over the tops of the tall trees, and striving to get a glimpse of the fair flowers that grew beneath their shade. The fresh, pure breeze lifted the golden curls from off the brow of Florette, and tinged her cheek with the hue of her favorite rose.

The little girl enjoyed the beauty and freshness that every where surrounded her, and went gayly on, warbling a few notes in unison with the newly awakened birds, or running swiftly forward to meet the breeze that she loved to feel among her hair.

The bouquet was gathered, but in Florette's eyes its greatest charm was absent. The child loved flowers as though they had been living things; to her they seemed to speak with many voices, and to be conscious of her tender care.

But the wild flowers were her dearest favorites, and the spots where they grew, her accustomed haunts. None knew so well where the modest violet dwelt in its shaded home, or the mountain daisy

flecked the hill-side. Every wooded dell had been explored in the little flower-seeker's rambles after the brilliant golden rod, and lace-like alder blossom; and each brook-side bore the prints of her tiny foot-steps, as she sought the fairy-like forget-me-not, that loves to bathe its soft leaves in the stream.

Little Florette went gayly on through brake and brier, in search of her wildwood favorites, that their sweet breath might mingle with that of their more cultivated sisters of the garden. The sun had not yet penetrated the thick foliage, and the blossoms seemed timidly awaiting his coming.

As the little girl parted the twigs and branches that wove themselves into a natural trellis across her path, she suddenly uttered an exclamation of de-lighted surprise, for there, just at her feet, grew the loveliest flower that had ever met the gaze of the enraptured child. The boughs had intertwined again, as she withdrew her hand, and she found herself standing upon a soft greensward, surrounded with lofty trees, while close beneath their shade was the lovely flower.

It was a lily of such rare and dazzling whiteness as would shame the fairest of its garden rivals, while its fragrant breath floated like incense on the sum-mer air. The bud was not yet fully opened, but bowed its beautiful head, as though wearied with the

weight of diamond dew-drops that oppressed it, or like a captive princess, in the power of an enchanter, who bound her with a chain of gems, that it needed but one smile from the golden sun to dissolve.

Little Florette gazed upon the flower awhile in perfect delight; then she advanced to pluck it from its stem, and place it with those she had already gathered. She paused; it seemed so pure in its stately solitude, that she could not bear to spoil its beauty. With a steady hand she parted the foliage of the tree that shaded it most, and a bright golden sunbeam poured in through the aperture, and rested like a crown upon the lovely flower.

With a smile on her lips, as radiant as the sunbeam itself, Florette looked fondly on the lily; she thought it seemed to enjoy the mild morning beam, and lifted its head slowly from the stem. A long while stood the patient child, keeping back the envious leaves that sought to shut out the sunshine from the beauteous forest flower, and as she gazed delightedly upon it, she was sure that its leaves unfolded slowly, and the dew-drops disappeared, until it rested amid its dark green leaves, like a queen on an emerald throne, and proudly met the golden sunbeam.

The little girl was happy in the evident enjoyment she had given the stately flower, when, even as

she gazed upon it, the leaves opened and spread more and more, and forth from the heart of the flower appeared a tiny form, white and radiant, while the lily seemed like a pearl shell beneath her feet. She rested lightly upon the floweret's edge as it swayed gracefully in the breeze, and, mingled with the sweet fragrance it exhaled, these words were borne to the ear of the wondering child:

"Bright as the sunbeam that set me free,
Little Florette, shall thy pathway be,
And ever more shall a silver ray
Light thy steps in thine onward way.

Tears of sorrow, clouds of care,
In thy presence no heart shall bear;
As the diamond chain from my bosom fell,
Shall human grief vanish beneath thy spell.

Blossoms bright shall round thee spring,
Odors sweet their fragrance fling;
Little Florette, thou hast set me free,
Blessing and blest shall thy future be."

In her amazement, Florette had let the branches spring back from her hold, and as the sunlight left the flower, the fairy figure faded into air. When the little girl ventured to approach the plant, she saw nothing more than the rich and lovely lily that had first attracted her.

Thoughtfully Florette left the wood; she gathered no more wild flowers; all her thoughts were upon the wonderful lily. She remembered to have read in some old fairy tale, how beautiful spirits were imprisoned in trees and flowers, and she felt sure that she had unknowingly liberated one of them. She was happy to think the lovely lily fairy was freed through her means, but she never mentioned her unobtrusive acts of kindness, and so said not a word to any one of her adventure in the woods.

"Take care, dear grandmother," said Florette, as she tenderly supported the old lady's steps in her afternoon walk, "take care; there are stones in the path, and I fear you will stumble," and she stooped down to remove them from the way.

"Bless the dear child," answered the old lady, fondly, "I always see better when you are with me; look there now, what a bright sunbeam falls just before me! and why, Florette, where did you find lilies to weave that wreath that you wear?"

The grandmother placed her hand on the head of the little girl as she spoke, and finding no flowers there, smiled as she added, "Nay, my old eyes have deceived me, it was but the sunlight flickering through the leaves."

Florette made no reply; but she wondered in her heart whether she did not wear a wreath woven by the lily fairy.

It was strange how often, after this, the sunshine and the leaves formed magical crowns on the brow of the little girl. Frequently, when at play with her companions, or performing some little act of kindness for them, would they exclaim, "Florette is crowned with lilies!"

But, upon grasping the apparent flowers, the wreath proved nothing more than shadows on her hair.

The good old gardener declared that the sunshine grew brighter when Florette came near, and that every flower flourished upon which she smiled; while throughout all the village her presence seemed to shed a light and joy. Old and young felt this magic influence, and loved the little girl.

It happened one pleasant afternoon, that a party of the village children went out into the woods to gather blackberries. They each took a little basket with cake or biscuit, and promised to return home at sunset.

Florette was not one of the number. Her grandmother was not very well that afternoon; and the little girl, though repeatedly urged by the old lady and some kind neighbors, who promised to stay and take care of her, and coaxed by her companions, yet

steadily refused to leave her grandmother, and so remained at home, to the great disappointment of the little party.

Florette saw them depart without one feeling of regret or impatience; and as she returned to her grandmother's side, the old lady smiled again at her own fancy, for she thought she saw a crown of radiant lilies among the curls of her grandchild.

Long after sunset, the little party returned, wearied and very sad. With many tears and bursts of grief, they told how one of their number was missing, and could nowhere be found. It was little Eddie, the only son of the lame widow. His mother, yielding to his wishes and the earnest entreaties of the children, had allowed him to go under the charge of his sister, who promised very faithfully not to lose sight of him for a moment.

He was a little fellow, scarcely four years old, and growing weary with the walk, the children seated him on a bank, with plenty of cakes and flowers, while they went a few paces farther, where the blackberries grew. They could see him as he sat there contentedly beneath the trees. Presently they went round to the other side of the bushes, and the leaves hid him a few moments from their sight. When they returned Eddie was gone!

With eager steps they ran to seek him, thinking

he could not have strayed far; but in vain they divided into groups and explored the woods, making the forest echo to their calls. The child was gone; and fearing they would themselves be lost, they hastened home to tell the mournful tale.

Every one in the village sympathized with the poor widow, who was almost crazed with grief. Eddie was a universal pet, and all the neighbors volunteered at once to go in search of him, as they thought he could not have strayed far, but had probably fallen asleep through weariness.

None grieved more for the lost child than Florette; he was her own darling, her especial favorite, and the tears rolled down her cheek as she listened to the story. After sitting thoughtful and silent for a while, she suddenly rose, and standing close by her grandmother's side, said:

"Grandmother, let me go and search for Eddie, I can find him, I am sure."

The old lady looked up in surprise.

"Why, darling," she replied, "it is now almost dark; you would get lost yourself, in the thick woods. Our kind neighbors have gone after him; they will bring him safely back."

But Florette sunk on her knees, and looking up pleadingly, kept repeating:

"Let *me* go, grandmother, *I* can find him, I am sure."

The grandmother shook her head, and was about to refuse, when again she saw the wreath of lilies resting on the brow of the suppliant child. The slender new moon was just rising, but a beam brighter than moonlight shone upon the little pleader, and lighted up her tearful face.

A feeling almost of awe crept over the aged parent, and laying her withered hands in blessing upon that fair young head, she said softly:

"Go, dear child; I feel that no harm will befall you. Had you been with them, this would not have been. You staid for my sake, go now with my blessing, and all good angels guard you."

Florette waited no second bidding, but thanking and kissing her grandmother, hastened out. She stopped to beg one of the neighbors to stay with the old lady while she was gone, and without waiting for any questioning, ran rapidly on.

It was growing dark; the shadows of the trees were long upon the grass; the moon was not full enough to give much light, and as the little girl penetrated farther into the woods, the thick foliage shut out the stars and fading twilight, so that she could scarcely see the way.

But Florette was not conscious of the increasing

darkness; she knew all the green alleys and by-paths of the forest by heart, and intent upon her purpose went fearlessly on, calling loudly the name of Eddie, and parting the twigs with unwearied hand, in the hope of finding the lost favorite. Ever as she walked, a silvery light seemed to fall upon her path, enabling her to explore thickets that to another would have been impenetrable.

Long time she pursued her fruitless search, her heart beating with hope as the echoes returned her call, or a startled bird rustled the leaves near her. She had wandered very far, and even her hopeful courage began to fail as, wearied and desponding, she found herself surrounded on all sides by tall trees and thick underbrush, without any apparent opening.

As she looked anxiously around, not knowing which way to turn, these words came, like the sighing of a light summer breeze, floating towards her:

> "Little Florette, gentle and good,
> Follow,—we'll lead you out of the wood."

The wondering child looked down at these words, and there, as far as she could see by the faint light, appeared a row of stately lilies, marking with their white flowers a direct pathway before her.

With a glow of gratitude, not unmixed with awe, Florette followed the track of the radiant lilies. They

seemed to spring up before her as she went, until they led her out of the thick woods to an open space, where a brook rippled through the grass and amid the trees.

The little girl paused an instant, and then, with a cry of delight, sprang forward, for there, upon the smooth turf, with his curly head pillowed on his dimpled arm, lay the little wanderer, the lost Eddie, fast asleep!

Florette threw herself by his side, and almost stifled him with kisses, while tears of joy and thankfulness showered upon him. But the little runaway was too weary to be thoroughly aroused. He seemed conscious of her presence, for faintly returning her caresses, and murmuring, "My own Flory," he nestled his head in her lap, and fell fast asleep again.

As Florette folded the tired wanderer in her arms, she knew not what to do. Eddie was not able to walk home, even if she could succeed in retracing her steps, and she was afraid to stay out in the woods all night. While she sat undecided, a delicious fragrance breathed around her, and again invisible, she heard sweet voices say:

"Sleep, Florette, without a fear,
Kindly spirits guard thee near,
And the stars with eyes of love,
Look upon thee from above.

Lilies fair shall make thy bed,
Pillow soft thy weary head,
Calmly shalt thou take thy rest,
Safe as on a mother's breast.

As the beam that set me free,
So shall thine awakening be,
Grief shall change to pure delight;
Sleep till morn. Good night, good night."

As the last note floated on the air, Florette seemed to feel gentle arms twining round her, and sweet breaths fanning her brow; a sense of happiness and security stole over her, and she slept.

Florette awoke with a start; it was early dawn; the sun was tinging the tree-tops, and glancing on the brook. The little girl thought she had been dreaming;—she looked down, there nestled Eddie, yet asleep in her lap. Many faces clustered about her, voices sounded in her ears; in an instant the lost child was clasped in his mother's arms; and Florette found herself surrounded by her friends.

Many questions they asked, as to how she tracked the wanderer, but she could tell them nothing, save that she sought and found him. They told her how they had given up the search at night, and returned at daybreak; how they had followed the course of the brook, fearing Eddie was drowned, and had found them both sleeping there.

They saw them at a distance they said, and they seemed to be lying upon a bed of lilies, while the white and pure flowers bent over the sleepers as though shielding them from harm. But when they approached nearer, they found nothing but the green bank, and the sunshine flickering amid the leaves, though a sweet fragrance floated on the air.

As Eddie was carried home in triumph, and Florette, regardless of her wounded feet, tripped joyously along with her hand clasped in that of the grateful mother, what blessings and praises were showered upon her, and the widow exclaimed:

"Look now, Florette wears the crown of lilies—but no," she added, as she laid her hand fondly on the child's head; "like the bed of flowers we saw this morning, it is only the sunshine, and the shadows of the leaves."

Florette made no reply: her heart was full of strange emotion, for she knew that she *had* slept upon a bed of flowers, and been lulled to rest in the arms of the Lily Fairy.

There were tears in the eyes of some of the young listeners, as Aunt Elsie laid down the manuscript, and little Lily, throwing herself on May's lap, sobbed outright.

"What is the matter, dear child?" asked May, kindly.

"I don't know indeed," sobbed Lily, smiling through her tears, "but it seems as if you were Florette; and then the frozen robin, and the lily, and poor lost Eddie, and my own self seem to be all confused together, and I *must* cry, dear May, because you are so good and Eddie is found again!"

Another shower of tears followed this incoherent speech; but Aunt Elsie, who understood the feeling that was struggling for expression in the child's heart, tenderly lifted Lily on her lap, and resting her head upon her bosom, said softly:

"And now will you be my little Lily Fairy, and tell me what made the silver beam and the lilies follow Florette?"

"Because she was gentle and good, and not one bit selfish," replied the child.

"And the silver beam is the light that kind words and actions always shed around," added Clara.

"The crown of lilies is the glory of pure and gentle thoughts," remarked Grace, thoughtfully. "Is it not so, Aunt Elsie?"

Aunt Elsie bowed assent, but ere she could speak little Frank Field was bending over his sister, and kissing her fondly, said:

"And this is my safeguard from all selfishness, —my silver beam—my Lily Fairy!"

The window was left open on the following morning, but the robin showed no desire to depart until the sun shone out at noon; he then flew off, but towards night returned, and perched as before, on the old bookcase. During all the winter he was an occasional visitor, and in stormy weather, a constant guest; but when spring returned, with buds and blossoms, robin sang a sweet farewell, and flew away to join his mate.

CHAPTER VI.

"I SAY, Frank, where did you put my ball? you had it last," cried Willie Graham, in an impatient tone, as he burst into the room.

Frank looked pleasantly up from the map he was drawing, and replied:

"I put it in your box, Willie, that stands in the corner of the play-room. I told you I would put it back, you know, and so I did."

"But you didn't, though," answered Willie, with a flushed face, "for I have tossed every thing out of the box, and there is no ball there."

"Perhaps, then, it has rolled away. I will go and look for it," said Frank, gently, and rising from his seat he left the room to hunt up the missing ball.

Willie threw himself on a chair in a pet; he was evidently in a very ill-humor with Frank, and muttered something about wasting all the afternoon just for other people's carelessness.

Nobody spoke to him, and Aunt Elsie looked very grave, when the door opened and Frank appeared.

"I am sorry that I cannot find the ball, Willie," said he; "I have searched every where. One of the boys must have taken it out, for I am very sure I put it safely away. Wait a moment, and I will run out and ask them."

"You need not trouble yourself," cried the other, hurriedly rising with an angry face. "I know no one has taken it, because I am sure you never put it back. I warrant it is buried up in the snow where you left it. It serves me just right for lending a ball to such a stupid bookworm, and the next time you want to borrow one, Master Frank, please to ask somebody else."

So saying, Willie banged the door very unceremoniously after him and went to join the boys, who were playing ball out upon the grounds.

Frank returned to his seat with a troubled face, and sat thoughtfully looking in the fire.

"Willie is in quite a rage," said Lucy Parker, with a smile.

"He is a very cross, naughty boy, to speak so to my own Franky, who never loses any thing," added little Lily, kissing her brother's cheek.

"When did you have the ball, Frank?" asked Aunt Elsie.

"I had it yesterday morning," he replied, repressing the tears that rose to his eyes, at the thought of Willie's rude speech; "and I am certain that I returned it, because I remember that the box of ninepins was upset, and I arranged it at the same time."

"And I saw the ball lying on the box late last night, when I went to put away our tea set," added Jessie Lester.

Just then the door opened, and Willie entered. He looked very serious, and going up to Frank held out his hand, saying:

"I spoke very unkindly to you, Franky, and have come back to ask your forgiveness. I am very, very sorry that I called you a stupid bookworm, and said you didn't return the ball, for I know you always tell the truth. If it is lost I am sure it is not your fault, and you are welcome to any thing I have. Will you forgive me, Frank?"

Frank grasped the proffered hand of his playmate, and with a glad, bright smile, assured him of his entire forgiveness, and besought him to say no more about it. Meanwhile the other boys came in from their play, and after the warming of feet and hands was pretty well over, and the talking and buzz had subsided, Aunt Elsie spoke:

"Has any one seen Willie's ball?" she asked. "It seems that it cannot be found."

"Why, yes," cried George, "here it is;" and he pulled the ball from his pocket, as he spoke. "Don't you remember, Willie, that I asked you to lend it to me early this morning?"

"Oh, yes," answered Willie, coloring. "I remember very well now. I was scarcely awake at the time, and must have fallen asleep afterwards, and so forgot all about it. I am heartily ashamed of having accused any one of losing it. I am very sorry, Frank."

Frank put up his finger. Aunt Elsie deemed it best to take no farther notice of the affair, as Willie had acknowledged his fault, and the tea bell ringing just then, the hungry group were soon doing ample justice to the good things spread before them.

After tea little Lily sat thoughtfully before the fire, at Aunt Elsie's side, while Norah Graham leaned upon the old lady's knee.

"I have been thinking," said Lily, "what the good spirit was, that made Willie apologize to Franky for his cross words."

"It was his generous heart," replied Norah, a little proudly.

"More likely, shame," said Lucy Parker, who now joined the group.

"Or a voice like that of the Shadowless," added Grace.

"Pray, Aunt Elsie, what was it?" asked Lily, looking up appealingly.

The old lady smiled, but made no answer. She rose from her seat, and opening her portfolio, looked over her papers, and selecting a few, seated herself at the table, saying:

"And now I will read you a story."

The elder children looked surprised and pleased at this rather abrupt announcement; and Norah whispered to Lily:

"Now we shall find out what prompted Willie to acknowledge his fault."

Lily nodded, and both seating themselves on low stools at Aunt Elsie's side, listened with eager interest to the story of

The Wonderful Watch.

"This is my birth-day," cried little Artolphe, joyously, as he entered his father's study—"this is my birth-day, dear father, and I am so very anxious to see the beautiful present that you promised me when I attained my tenth year."

The father looked up from his book, very pleasantly, and drawing his little boy towards him, spoke

affectionate and playful words about the mature age to which his son had arrived, and kissed his brow fondly.

Then he arose, and opening a private drawer of his writing desk, took thence a small red morocco case, which he gave to the expectant boy.

Artolphe eagerly opened the clasps, and cried out with delight, on beholding a small and exquisitely made watch suspended to a slender gold chain.

After the little boy had sufficiently admired his new possession, his father called him to his side, and taking the watch in his hand, said:

"This watch, my dear Artolphe, was given to you when you were born; but as it is far too valuable for an infant's toy, I have kept it carefully until I considered that you were old enough to take proper care of it yourself: I have always endeavored to regulate it so as to keep true time; and now, before resigning it into your charge, I must tell you some of its peculiar virtues."

Artolphe looked earnest and attentive, and his father continued:

"This watch not only tells you the time, but teaches you how to spend it profitably, besides being a faithful monitor, and warning you very plainly when you do wrong. You observe how silently the hands move upon the dial; it makes no ticking, like an ordinary

time-piece, but whenever you hear its 'tick-tick,' however softly, pause in what you are doing or thinking, for you may be sure it is something wrong."

Artolphe was very much surprised at hearing these wonderful qualities of his new watch, and asked his father who made it, and who it was that gave it to him.

"It was made and given you by your best friend," replied his father, "and you can show your gratitude for the gift by carefully attending to its admonitions, and above all by regulating the watch itself. If you disregard its gentle ticking, the sound will become louder and louder; but you must take care lest, hearing it so constantly, you become insensible to its voice; as by continual ticking the main-spring will break, and then it is ruined for ever, unless the same kind friend who made it should graciously please to repair it for you. But by wilful neglect of his gift you will forfeit his friendship and favor. The oftener it ticks to remind you of your faults, the more disordered it becomes, and you must never neglect to regulate it every night and morning. In this book you will find the proper directions for its use, together with the promise of future benefits from the friend who gave it to you: and now, my dear son, I give this invaluable gift into your possession, and hope you will deserve its benefits by attending to its teachings."

He then clasped the chain that held the watch around the little boy's neck, and gave him the book containing the rules for its proper management. Artolphe thanked his father a thousand times, and promising to regulate it carefully, hastened away to examine at leisure the beautiful and wonderful watch. All that day and the next, Artolphe could think of nothing but his new possession, and was very careful to regulate it by the rules he found in the book. During all this time it had not ticked once; but the following day had been set apart for an excursion, and Artolphe expected a great deal of pleasure. When he awoke in the morning, the rain was pouring down in torrents, and the thick clouds gave sure evidence of a stormy day.

The little boy was terribly disappointed, and consequently ill-natured; he became cross and impatient, and talked very foolishly about its raining on purpose to torment him. When his father told him to go to his lessons, as the excursion must be postponed, he went with a very ill grace, and taking his book, dashed it on the floor with vexation.

Just then he heard a "tick-tick" very distinctly he was startled, and listened thoughtfully.

"Tick-tick," spoke the voice of his monitor.

A blush of shame crimsoned the brow of the now repentant boy, as he lifted his book and earnestly be-

gan his task. The wonderful watch had not warned him in vain, and his ill-humor disappeared.

The next day was clear and bright, and the promised excursion was taken. When Artolphe saw how refreshed and beautiful every thing looked after the rain, and that there was no dust to annoy them, he felt doubly the folly of his disappointed impatience, and could not refrain from telling his father all about his vexation and the ticking of the wonderful watch.

His father then told him that the friend who made him that present, was his own best and truest friend also, and that if Artolphe properly valued his gift, he would be a benefactor during all his life. He said that he himself always applied to this friend for advice and assistance, and received all benefits from his hand. When Artolphe heard this, he determined to be more careful than ever of his precious gift.

Time wore away, and the possession of the wonderful watch had ceased to be a novelty. It frequently ticked when Artolphe thought he did not deserve reproof; but it had already prevented him from doing many improper things, and broken up several bad habits by its gentle and timely voice.

Artolphe kept it in pretty good order; but sometimes, when he went to bed very tired, or rose rather late, he neglected to regulate his watch, and then what a ticking it kept up during the day! Artolphe

was sometimes tempted to give it up altogether, but upon reflection always found that the watch was right, and so repented of his neglect and inattention.

Some time after this, Artolphe was sent away to school, and here his watch proved his faithful and unwearied monitor. He had never been thrown much in the society of boys, and at the school there were many who not only appeared to possess no watch to warn them, but who seemed to delight in doing mischief, or what they knew to be wrong.

When they discovered the mystery of Artolphe's watch, they teased him incessantly about it, and laughed at him for being so foolish as to regard its voice. But the impressions he had brought from his own happy home, were yet fresh in his mind; and being fortunately upheld in his good resolutions by one or two older companions, Artolphe became more watchful over himself and more attentive to his faithful monitor's voice, until he obtained the sobriquet of the "Watchman."

For a long while all things went on well, until, unfortunately for Artolphe, his two friends were called away from school, and the little boy was left to combat the taunts and sneers of his companions quite alone.

Artolphe persisted in his course for a time, but being very affectionate, he could not bear to find him-

self shunned by all his associates for what they called his foolish pride of morality, and so little by little he yielded to their influence. Often when warned by the ticking of his watch, not to join in some forbidden pleasure, the sneering laugh, or apparently affectionate pleading of his companions, prevailed, and he endeavored to silence the voice of his monitor in boisterous mirth. It is just to some of the boys who enticed him, that it should be told, they did not see the harm of what they did, so plainly as Artolphe, because they had not been taught; and of course the blame of Artolphe was threefold.

As the boy became accustomed to the now almost constant ticking of his watch, its voice was disregarded, and he scarcely ever thought of looking in his book, or endeavoring to regulate it. When he did make the attempt, he found his watch so much disordered by long neglect, that it would be a great labor to put it in order again, and so he became indifferent and left the task undone.

Winter came with its usual enjoyments, and the boys were anticipating with delight the merry Christmas vacation, but in the mean time were busy devising schemes of pleasure. Some of them proposed a skating frolic, on a very large and deep pond, a little distance from the house. This, the teacher positively forbade, as the season had been unusually

mild, and the ice was not sufficiently solid to insure safety.

Most of the pupils submitted to his authority, but a few of the most daring rebelled, and determined to enjoy the forbidden pleasure. The nights were moonlight, and they resolved to steal out softly after all had retired, "to have a good skate." Artolphe was persuaded to join this reckless party, who declared their willingness to undergo punishment in the event of a discovery, rather than forego their favorite amusement.

The appointed night came, and Artolphe sat upon the side of his cot, ready dressed, and awaiting the preconcerted signal. His lamp had been extinguished, and there was no light except the bright, pure moonshine, that poured its full beams upon him. As the boy listened anxiously for the given signal, the loud "tick-tick" of his watch, smote upon his ear.

"Tick, tick, tick," how fearfully loud and distinct it was! It seemed like the heavy stroke of a hammer on the boy's heart.

He could not silence it then by boisterous gayety; but there, in the solemn hush of the night, in the pure rays of the moon, he sat and listened to the warning note.

"Tick, tick, tick."

Artolphe leaned down his head and thought.

He remembered his father's words, his own broken promises, and his teacher's commands. He thought of his present disobedience, and shuddered. He was about to steal out, like a thief in the night, to partake a dangerous pleasure, at the expense of duty, truth, and every principle of right. As he reflected on his present conduct, the memory of past transgressions rose vividly before him, and the tears coursed down his cheeks.

"I will not go," he said resolutely. And then the watch was stilled.

Just then he heard the given signal, and crept softly to the window; his companions stood beneath with their skates in hand. He shook his head, as token of dissent to their invitation, and they pointed their fingers scornfully at him, and went away, some beckoning him to follow.

Artolphe turned from the window, and his eyes rested on the skates. It was a moment of temptation. He imagined the jeers of his companions, and turning again towards the window, watched their receding forms as they stepped rapidly over the frozen ground. He could see the clear ice-floored pond, gleaming in the moonlight like burnished silver, and he hesitated.

"Tick, tick, tick," came the warning note; and

now it seemed to fill the room with its earnest solemn sound.

Artolphe yielded to impatience.

He drew the watch from his bosom, and would have cast it aside in anger, but the chain held it firmly; and now it seemed to thrill beneath his touch, in the earnestness of its expostulation.

He paused—his gaze rested unconsciously upon the neglected book of rules for the regulation of his inestimable watch. It was covered thick with dust, for it had not been opened in very many weeks.

He took down the neglected volume, and opened it there in the bright moonlight, and his glance fell on some of the glorious promises for the future, provided he fulfilled his duty and was careful of his gift.

Artolphe was startled. "Shall I resign all this good for an hour of stolen pastime?" said he to himself. "No, I will *not* go."

He put the watch back in his bosom, and seating himself by the window, read from the long neglected book in the clear moonlight.

Suddenly a sharp, terrible cry broke the stillness. Artolphe looked out, and there in the distance he could see the forms of two boys, wildly tossing their arms as they struggled amid the ice, on the now broken surface of the pond—the rest had disappeared.

Again and again, in quick succession, arose the screams of fear and agony.

Quick as thought, Artolphe sprang to the great bell that was rung to awaken the household at morning. With all his strength, he pulled the rope, and the loud clang that startled the silent echoes, was instantly answered by the teacher himself, who opened his door in alarm.

"Oh, come, do come, they will all be drowned!" cried the agitated boy, still pulling at the rope.

Several members of the family now appeared.

"Where are they?—what is it?—what can be the matter?" cried different voices, as they now distinguished the cries.

"The pond! the pond! they will sink and die!" repeated Artolphe, rushing to the door.

The teacher and ushers, having hastily thrown on their clothes, followed hurriedly; they began to understand it now.

Artolphe flew before them like the wind.

"Keep up!" he shouted, "help is coming!"

They reached the pond, and two boys were extricated just as they were sinking. A third was dragged out lifeless from beneath the ice. They could find no more.

But Artolphe knew that there were five in all.

He told the people who had now gathered, and they searched for them in vain.

They bore the senseless boys to the house, and tried every means to restore them to animation. Two recovered consciousness, but the third never awoke again.

The bodies of the other two were recovered on the following morning, and Artolphe told the teacher the history of the past night's scheme.

As Artolphe stood beside the cold and lifeless forms of the three drowned truants, and remembered how he had seen them last, pointing jeeringly at him, a feeling of trembling awe crept over him.

Might he not have been one of them? This thought sent the blood back to his heart; he shuddered, and remembered with a prayer of thankfulness the warning voice of his faithful monitor.

When Artolphe returned home at Christmas, he made a full confession to his father of all his evil deeds, and as he dwelt with horror upon the temptation and terrible scenes of that fearful night, he promised, with many tears, never again to neglect the invaluable treasure he possessed, but to heed faithfully its warning admonitions, and its slightest note.

And Artolphe kept his word.

The story was finished, and Aunt Elsie, turning to Lily, asked:

"And now Lily, what prompted Willie to acknowledge his fault?"

"I think," answered the little girl, with a bright smile, "that Willie must wear a wonderful watch, to tell him when he does right or wrong."

"To be sure he does, and so do you," remarked Clara.

"And so do we all," cried Bertha.

"What can it be," asked Norah, thoughtfully. "Oh, I have it now: the wonderful watch was Conscience, and the chain that would not break, was good habits."

Aunt Elsie smiled approvingly.

"Willie was a good boy to obey it," whispered Lily to Norah, "and I love him better than ever."

"Aunt Elsie read that story for my especial benefit," said Willie, cheerfully, "and my conscience applies it. I only hope I shall always keep my wonderful watch in such good order that its slightest ticking will alarm me."

"You must give good heed to the book of laws, then, Willie," remarked Grace.

"Which is the Bible," added May, "and prayer is the key to regulate our conscience with; is it not so, Aunt Elsie?"

"Yes, my children," answered the dear Aunt Elsie, "and happy would it be for all of us, if our consciences were ever kept regulated by that precious book, so that its still, small voice might check us with its warning note. Remember that each of you wear a wonderful watch, presented by the Great Giver of all good, and to Him you are accountable for its safety. Be careful, therefore, that ye despise not his friendship, but profiting by the fearful warning of Artolple, resolve to follow his after example of good conduct, and go and do likewise."

CHAPTER VII.

The little party were all invited to a juvenile festival in the neighborhood, and very pretty they looked when assembled in the dear old parlor to get thoroughly warmed before starting.

Such a hum of merry voices arose from this little social swarm as made the room buzz again with the cheerful sound. And the display of rosy cheeks and sparkling eyes, white collars, and smoothly-braided hair, was suggestive of all the pleasant associations of joyous childhood and innocent mirth.

The girls were neatly attired in high merino dresses, finished at the throat with narrow rich lace. They wore no ornaments, for they needed none, save their own unshadowed sunny beauty. With an affectionate and graceful feeling they had endeavored to dress as nearly alike as possible, and they chose their "uniform," as they called it, to be a plain one, because they went to enjoy as children, and not to be admired

as belles. Dear good Aunt Elsie went busily amidst the little group, smoothing the braided hair of one, arranging the folds of another's dress, tying mufflers, warming mittens, and seeing that the little feet were well protected from the cold.

Old Dinah, too, was there, her arms piled to her chin with cloaks and tippets, waiting the calls of their respective owners. Her shining face expanded with sympathetic pleasure, and peering out from behind her screen of clothing, to catch a glimpse of the "little fairies," as she always called them, "specially Miss Lily."

And now all were in readiness. The large sleigh was at the door, and the merry group in the hall, when Aunt Elsie, who stood at the parlor door, waiting the toll of a kiss from every smiling passer-by, exclaimed,

"But where is Bertha? I have not seen her yet."

And then it was remembered that Bertha had not yet come down, and Norah Graham was running up stairs to find what delayed her, when Bertha herself appeared, bonneted and cloaked for her journey.

"I am quite ready," she cried, running hastily up to kiss Aunt Elsie, "and not at all cold; come, let us be off; don't say I kept you waiting."

"Whew! Bertha means to be queen to-night," cried Ernest, as his sister's cloak flew open, "see what

a fine dress she has on: girls, hide your diminished heads."

"Nonsense, Ernest, how you talk," answered Bertha, blushing confusedly; then hastily folding her mantle about her, she followed her companions, some of whom were already seated in the sleigh; not, however, before the quick eye of Aunt Elsie had noted that she wore a dress of rich and costly silk, which she had brought only to be worn, as her mother desired, on very particular occasions.

Breakfast was later than usual on the following morning, for the children were unused to dissipation, and sleep hung heavy on their eyelids. But when at last the morning meal had been discussed, and their spirits resumed their usual tone, the remembrance of the previous evening's enjoyments came fresh upon them, and every tongue assured Aunt Elsie that the party had been a delightful one.

Bertha said less than any of her companions, and Aunt Elsie knew, by her unwonted silence, that something had gone wrong with her at least.

When the group had dispersed to their several employments, little Lily remained with Aunt Elsie, and when the old lady had seated herself in her accustomed chair, the child laid her bright face on her kind friend's lap, and said, with a little sigh:

"Do you know, Aunt Elsie, I am afraid Bertha didn't enjoy herself at all last night."

"Indeed, my dear! why not?" asked her listener.

"I can hardly tell why, but I know what I think," answered the little girl thoughtfully. "And so, Aunt Elsie, I will just tell you all about it. You see, Bertha didn't dress like the rest, although they expected her to. She wore her figured garnet silk with short sleeves, and deep lace round the neck; then she had a necklace and brooch, and her hair all curled. I wonder she did not let you see her, Aunt Elsie, for she did look so beautiful. I think she wanted to surprise us. I thought every one would admire her, but some way they did not seem to notice her much, and I thought she looked disappointed and unhappy. One lady, who sat next me, asked if Bertha belonged to our party; and when I said, yes ma'am, she remarked that it was a wonder she did not dress like the rest, and added, 'She must be very proud.' Another lady said, 'Who is that vain girl in the corner, who evidently thinks herself a young lady? It is a pity she is overdressed, for she is really quite handsome.' I longed to tell the ladies that Bertha was neither vain nor proud, but they didn't seem to notice me because I was so little, and I did not like to speak. And then, what was worse than all, an ugly ill-mannered boy was offended because Bertha refused to

dance with him, and he nicknamed her the 'empress, and pretended to wait upon her all the time, just to tease her, you know. And when he handed her some lemonade, he awkwardly spilt it on her dress, spoiling it entirely. Instead of being sorry, he only laughed. Was not that outrageous conduct? Another accident happened beside; the rich lace on her sleeve caught in a pin during one of the games, and tore a great piece off. Bertha looked so very unhappy after this, and went into a corner all alone: she would not join in any plays afterwards."

"And did none of her companions make any remarks about her dress to Bertha?" asked Aunt Elsie, when Lily paused, fairly out of breath.

"Yes," answered the child, "Lucy Parker asked her why she didn't wear her merino dress, and she said 'because it was too short;' and you know, Aunt Elsie, Bertha would never tell a story."

"I do not think she would, my dear," replied the old lady dryly, "but the dress might have been lengthened in time."

Little Lily was commencing a warm defence of her friend, when several of the little folks entered and interrupted the conversation. Nothing more was said upon the subject; but Aunt Elsie thought the short frock was not the only reason of Bertha's gay dress,

for she had observed pride to be the young girl's great est fault.

After dinner the young people plead hard for a story, as they felt no zest for their usual pastimes, and expected to retire early. Aunt Elsie had an object in view, and did not refuse their request; but, promising them a good long story, selected and read the following, called

The Red and White Rose-Trees.

Fairest of all the village maidens was the young Viola. Her step was lighter than that of the startled fawn; her voice sweeter than the nightingale. The melting eyes of the far-famed gazelle were dim compared with hers; and her form was like the graceful willow swayed by the gentle breeze. She was indeed the queen-rose in the garden of loveliness; but as every rose must have a thorn, so Viola, being conscious of her beauty, marred its perfection; and they who admired this human flower, were nevertheless pierced and wounded by the hateful thorns of vanity and pride that clustered thickly around it.

Proud as she was, Viola had nought but her beauty to boast. Her family were very poor, and at the

summer fêtes she was distinguished as much by her exceeding homeliness of dress, as by her surpassing loveliness. Though she needed no other adornment than her own charms, she was very fond of finery, and thought herself wonderfully improved by some tawdry ribbons, or gilded trinkets fantastically displayed upon her person.

Despite her faults, Viola had some fine qualities, but her intolerable pride and vanity, like a black cloud, veiled the sun of her goodness, and thus to have grown ugly would have been the happiest event of her life.

Her beauty won many admirers among the village swains, but of all who flattered or followed her, young Constant was the most sincere. While he deplored her folly, he loved her truly, and would fain have won her for his own. But the haughty beauty looked disdainfully on her rustic lover. She prized her charms too highly to offer them willingly on the shrine of homely domestic life, and waited, like the maiden in the fairy tale, until a prince or a nobleman should come along and woo her.

It happened one day that the rich lady who lived up at the castle, was riding that way, and seeing Viola, was surprised at her great beauty. Knowing something of her family, she asked the young girl to come up to the castle and stay a few days with her

This kind lady wished to discover whether Viola was as good as she was handsome, as in that case she was determined to be her friend. This distinction quite turned the head of the pretty Viola; she expected a thousand delightful things to happen in consequence of the visit, and already imagined herself riding in a grand coach, and mixing with the rich and great, quite forgetful of her former friends. So busy was she building castles in the air, that she kept aloof from all her associates, beginning already, in anticipation of future greatness, to treat them with cold indifference. And as for poor Constant, he pined beneath her freezing manner, for she repented heartily the small degree of favor that she had hitherto vouchsafed him, deigning him not the slightest notice; and her smiles, always rare, were now as unattainable as the philosopher's stone, and (by Constant at least) as eagerly sought for.

There was one great drawback to Viola's dreams of felicity. Her pride could not brook the thought of appearing at the castle in her homely clothes, and how to procure others she knew not. She thought she would be despised on account of her dress, for she had not wisdom enough to know, that the kernel is more prized than the shell, and that a diamond will shine in the dark.

Viola grieved and pined away, beneath her wound-

ed vanity and unattainable desire for fine clothes, until she was in a fair way to lose the beauty she so much valued. She became sad and melancholy as the time for her visit approached, and was sometimes tempted to forget it altogether.

One evening as she walked disconsolately through the wood, she threw herself beside a bright fountain that lavished its silvery waters willingly in the solitude, as though every tree had been admiringly bent over it. Viola saw the reflection of her own fair face in the clear depths, and Narcissus-like gazed long and admiringly upon it. Then sighing heavily, she said, repiningly:

"Oh, cruel fate, that granting me a beautiful person, denied me the power to adorn it. I might as well have been born the ugliest creature in the world, since none will expect to find beauty concealed in these miserable rags."

Tears showered from her eyes as she bent over the fountain, but she started back in surprise, for she beheld therein the reflection of two other faces beside her own.

She thought it was the eddies on the surface that caused this threefold reflection, but as she looked up, there, on either side of her, stood a beautiful female.

The figure on her right, was tall and of stately presence; her dark eyes flashed with conscious pow-

er, and her haughty, yet beautiful features, bore the impress of command. Upon her brow she wore a tiara of rare and precious gems; her purple robe fell in heavy folds to her feet, and was confined at the waist by a golden zone clasped with a diamond serpent. Her arms were adorned with circlets of gold and jewels, and she carried in her hand a golden wand, on the top of which was a superb rose, formed of the largest rubies, while pure emeralds, representing the green leaves, clustered around it.

Equally beautiful, though entirely dissimilar, was the other figure. Her slight form, flexile as the young mountain ash, was draped in a robe of the purest white, that floated like gossamer about her. Tresses of soft golden hair fell almost to her feet, and were confined at the temples by a slender silver fillet inwrought with pearls. She carried a silver wand, graced with a single rose formed of delicate pearls; and her soft violet eyes beamed with gentleness and love.

Viola gazed upon these beautiful apparitions with admiration and awe, when the stately lady spoke:

"Fear not, Viola," she said, "we are here to serve you. In us you behold the respective queens of two kingdoms; it is our privilege to select every year, a young maiden upon whom to bestow our benefits. Our mutual choice has fallen upon yourself; but as

we cannot both serve you, it remains for you to choose between us, which you prefer to be your guardian and your friend."

Viola listened in mute surprise to this address, when the lady of the White Rose said, in gentle tones:

"Before the maiden can make a choice, she must know what benefits to expect from each."

"True," replied the haughty lady; "let her see and judge."

So saying, she approached the fountain, and waving her wand above it, motioned Viola to come forward.

Viola bent over the water, and there, mirrored within its clear depths, she beheld the interior of a spacious apartment, the walls of which were hung with gorgeous tapestry, and the floor covered with carpet rich in velvet flowers. Rare and costly articles, such as had never, even in imagination, delighted the eyes of the young maiden, filled the room. But the object which riveted her gaze, was the figure of a beautiful girl seated before an immense mirror, adorning her hair with jewels; every variety of rare and beautiful ornaments were scattered around in rich profusion, and in the female form so magnificently attired, Viola beheld herself.

The delighted girl gazed long and earnestly upon this vision.

The Lady of the Red Rose knew well what would captivate her fancy and gratify her pride.

Even as she looked, the scene faded away, and in its place appeared a splendid banquet hall, brilliant with light and beauty. Crowds of persons superbly dressed filled the apartment. Tables loaded with rich viands, and luscious fruits, and vases filled with rare exotics, added to the enchantment of the scene.

Upon a chair at the extremity of the chamber, was seated one whose attire exceeded all others in magnificence, as her beauty eclipsed the fairest there. Each guest appeared anxious to attract her notice, and crowded about her with obsequious attentions, happy if repaid by a smile.

With a thrill of triumph, Viola again recognized, in the proud queen of the banquet, the reflection of herself.

As the scene faded from her view, she turned inquiringly towards the Lady of the Red Rose, who, knowing what she would ask, said smilingly:

"You have beheld, Viola, some of the gifts I have in my power to bestow, and have seen shadowed forth the fate that awaits you, if you make me your chosen guide and friend."

Viola was about eagerly expressing her gratitude,

and accepting the proffered good, when the Lady of the White Rose advanced and said:

"Viola, you will at least look upon the gifts I proffer you, though I fear they will prove unattrac tive."

There was something irresistibly sweet and persuasive in the gentle lady's voice, and with a feeling of shame, Viola once more looked upon the fountain.

The fairy waved her silver wand above the water, and immediately there appeared a rustic scene of perfect beauty. A white cottage nestled among the trees, like a dove in its nest. Delicate vines, rich in fragrant blossoms, curtained the open lattice, and twined about the door. A small stream wound, like a silver ribbon, amid the velvet fields, and over all breathed an air of perfect repose.

A form, gracefully yet plainly attired, knelt by the brook-side with a pitcher in her hand.

Viola saw the reflection of the young girl's countenance in the stream: it was her own.

A scene like this had no charm for the young maiden, who had just beheld such gorgeous visions, and she turned aside with a dissatisfied air.

When she looked again the scene was changed, and she saw a happy group, bearing garlands of flowers, and strewing them before a maiden, who, seated upon a green bank, appeared the centre of

attraction Purely arrayed in white, and crowned with roses, it was evident that she had been chosen queen of the May. The simple dress became her well, and with a feeling of satisfied vanity, Viola recognized herself in the lovely May queen.

She observed too, that there was something more than mere admiration in the faces of the group; they seemed to love their chosen queen, and no trace of envy was discernible among them. All was innocent mirth, and unalloyed happiness.

Viola turned away and sighed. For one moment she felt that it was better to be loved than admired; but her eyes were yet dazzled with the gorgeous pageant she had witnessed, and rising, she approached the Lady of the Red Rose, and bowed before her.

The stately lady smiled graciously upon her, and then bending the ruby rose that graced her wand, toward the ground, there instantly appeared a beautiful rose-tree, laden with crimson buds. The lady placed the tree in Viola's hand, and said:

"I know what your present desires are, and this rose-tree will accomplish them for you. Whenever you make a wish, pluck a bud and place it in your bosom; your wish will then be immediately fulfilled. You must be very careful to keep the tree well watered; if you let it wither you will forfeit my favor, and lose the good I have in store for you.

When the buds are all plucked save one, bring the last one hither, and cast it in the fountain, when the tree will immediately be covered with flowers again."

With sparkling eyes Viola received the rose-tree, and promised to tend it carefully; but when she would have expressed her gratitude, the stately lady had disappeared.

As Viola stood an instant in astonishment, the Lady of the White Rose approached; she held in her hand a rose-tree, filled with white moss buds, which she presented to the young girl, saying mildly:

"You will not prize my gift, Viola, as your choice is made, but should the time come when the pleasure you now seek has lost its charm, you will find a balm in this tree. Whenever you place a bud in your bosom, you will feel contentment and peace. It will bring you also the gratification of all moderate desires. Every time you gather a bud from the crimson tree, one of these will wither; but I beseech you, Viola, let it not perish from neglect; save at least one flower, and cast it on the fountain when you need a friend."

Viola accepted the proffered gift with downcast lids, and ere she could raise her eyes, the gentle lady, also, had vanished from her gaze.

Upon her return home, Viola placed the two rose-trees in her room, and anxious to test the power of

the stately lady from whom she expected so much, she plucked a bud from the crimson rose-tree, and placing it in her bosom, wished for a handsome dress, to wear the next day up to the castle.

Immediately there appeared before her a rich robe of silk, trimmed with lace, and knots of ribbon, far more elegant than any thing she had ever seen.

Viola was delighted at this proof of the rose-tree's virtues, and after arraying herself in her new dress, and admiring her person to her heart's content, she laid it carefully aside, and retired to dream of future enjoyment.

Early the next morning, Viola prepared for her intended visit, taking care to secrete the new dress within the bundle containing her ordinary clothes. She listened with ill disguised impatience to her mother, who cautioned her to behave well, and perhaps the rich lady would give her a situation at the castle. The good woman had no suspicion of the dreams that filled her daughter's brain; and Viola hastened to depart. You may be sure she did not forget the crimson rose-tree; but she left the white one behind, thinking that she could have nothing to desire, other than her beloved red rose could grant.

When Viola had proceeded some distance, she stepped aside into the thickest of the wood, and after carefully arraying herself in her rich dress, hid her

bundle of clothes among the bushes. As she surveyed herself in the stream, that had served her for a mirror, she was very well satisfied with her appearance, and flattered herself that she would make quite a sensation.

Suddenly the thought struck her, that a lady of her apparent rank never travelled on foot; she therefore determined to test the powers of her rose-tree still farther; and placing a bud in her bosom, wished for a carriage. With the word, there appeared a superb coach standing in the road!

Viola was enraptured; but she had neglected to wish for horses, and consequently no horses were there. With a smile at her own stupidity, the young girl plucked another bud, and wished for a fine pair of horses: in an instant they stood before the carriage.

Another and another bud was placed in her bosom, as she desired a coachman, footman, and outriders, who all, like well-disciplined servants, came at her call.

With the air of a princess, Viola stepped into the coach, the footman handed her the precious rose-tree, the driver touched his horses, and away they rattled toward the castle.

The gates were obsequiously opened by the porter when he saw so superb an equipage; and, in reply to Viola's inquiry for the lady, he informed her that she had unexpectedly left home for a few days to visit a

sick relative. He added, that there was at present a great deal of company at the castle whom his mistress had desired to stay until her return, and that as Viola was doubtless, an expected guest, he knew his lady would be offended if she refused to remain.

This information delighted Viola, who scarcely knew how to introduce herself. She had determined to tell the lady that a relative had unexpectedly died and left her a fortune; but she was glad of the opportunity to become familiarized in her new position before she met her hostess.

With a heart swelling with pride, Viola stepped from the carriage and swept into the hall, amid a crowd of admiring servants, each contending for the honor of conducting the beautiful stranger to her apartments. With an air of haughty condescension she permitted them to lead the way; but she trembled with anxiety on beholding her invaluable rose-tree carried by an officious menial.

During her drive, Viola had occasionally felt a sharp sting in her breast, as though pierced by a thorn; her mind was too much occupied with bright visions to heed it much; but now, as she passed through the splendid corridors with the step of an empress, and elated with pride, the stinging became intolerable, and looking down, she observed that the stems of the buds were covered with thorns. On enter-

ing the room appropriated to her, she closed the door, and impatiently snatching the flowers from her bosom, threw them out of the window. At the same moment she noted with surprise the disappearance of her elegant equipage; and a servant entering hastily, with an astonished face, said that, on going to show the coachman the way to the stables, the carriage and attendants were not to be found.

Viola replied, with a well-dissembled air, that she had ordered the carriage to return, as she should not need it until her departure. The servant bowed low and withdrew, leaving the young girl who had so readily coined a falsehood, to wonder at the strange disappearance of her fairy coach.

After some reflection, Viola attributed the loss of her equipage to her impatient casting away of the rose-buds, and resolved to be more careful in future.

Viola was amazed and delighted with the elegant appearance of every thing about her; she spent some time in admiring the costly furniture, and then, with a beating heart, placed one of the magical rose-buds in her bosom, and wished for a dress suited to the occasion.

Great was the sensation created when Viola, elegantly attired, appeared among the assembled guests. Murmurs of admiration greeted her on every side, and

each person supposing her to be a lady of rank, was solicitous to show her attention.

The young girl felt constrained and uneasy in her novel position; she was conscious of her ignorance of the polished forms of society, and feared to betray herself by some palpable awkwardness.

Her rare beauty, however, heightened by the splendid dress that she wore, carried every thing triumphantly before it. Her silence was attributed to modesty, and her mistakes to the manners of a foreign court. The gentlemen overwhelmed her with assiduities and flattery, and the ladies concealed their envy beneath the deference due to her supposed rank.

In a few days Viola became familiar with her new position, and received the adulation that showered upon her as her just due. It seemed evident that she was a person of high station, perhaps even a princess, and Viola found herself entangled in a perfect net of deceit. She was obliged to tell falsehood upon falsehood, in answer to any inquiries casually made her; but her brain was so completely turned with vanity and pride, that she could scarcely distinguish the true from the false, and actually began to believe herself the great lady she pretended to be.

Elated with triumph, she became haughty and insolent; the most trifling slight was construed into an

intentional affront; and though flattered and courted, the beautiful stranger was not beloved.

The rose-buds disappeared rapidly from the tree in fulfilling her extravagant desires; and though often in the midst of gayety, she felt their thorns pierce her breast, yet she had learned that to cast them aside would be to lose the gifts they brought; and so nerved herself to bear the sting, thus making herself a martyr to vanity and pride.

The rose-buds were all plucked, save two, and Viola determined upon an immediate visit to the fountain. She was endeavoring to form a plausible excuse for leaving the castle, when she was invited to join a party who intended riding out. Viola looked remarkably handsome on horseback, and she fancied that one young nobleman of the party felt something more than admiration for her. She could not resist the opportunity of appearing to advantage before him, and thus her vanity overcoming prudence, she deferred her visit to the fountain and joined the riders.

Very beautiful she looked in the elegant riding-dress, procured by the magical rose-tree. Her eyes sparkled with gratified vanity as she listened to the compliments that were poured into her willing ear, her cheek glowed with exercise, and her long ringlets floated on the breeze.

So interested was Viola in a conversation with

an attendant admirer, that she did not notice their approach towards her native village, until the party paused to admire the fine landscape; and some children stopping in the road to gaze on the gay cavalcade, one of them ran towards her, exclaiming:

"Viola has come back! Viola has come back! Constant, come and see! here is Viola grown a rich lady, and come home to see us again!"

Confused and surprised at this unexpected recognition, Viola looked up, and perceiving that they were entering the village where her days of poverty were passed, urged her horse to a brisker pace. But her habit had become entangled in some briers, and as she hastily endeavored to extricate it, the branches were parted, and to her infinite terror and dismay, Constant stood before her.

He paused an instant on beholding the party,—gazed earnestly on Viola, then springing forward with a broken cry of joy, exclaimed:

"Viola! yes, it is indeed herself! but oh, how wonderful is this!"

The blood rushed to her face at this address, and not daring to look at the speaker, she waved him aside with a haughty gesture, and would have passed on.

But Constant would not be thus repulsed; laying his hand on the neck of the steed, he said earnestly:

"Lady, if you are indeed mortal, and not a beautiful vision sent to mock my hopes, speak to me but one word; say that you remember Constant."

Thus adjured, Viola dared not refuse an answer. The gaze of her companions was riveted upon this strange scene. Viola felt that every thing depended upon her self-possession, and lifting her eyes with a look of assumed surprise to the haggard countenance of her former lover, replied with forced composure:

"I remember no one of that name, young man; neither am I the person you suppose.—Poor fellow," she added, turning with a compassionate air to her companions, "I fear he must be crazed."

The expression of anguish with which Constant heard these words, would have melted any other than a pride-incrusted heart. He had no farther doubts, her voice had too long echoed in his inmost soul to be ever forgotten. Why she appeared thus richly attired, and surrounded by the gay and great, he knew not; it was enough that he saw her living, and more beautiful than ever. She should not leave him thus.

Placing his hand firmly upon the bridle, he spoke again in a voice choked with intensity of feeling:

"Viola—for Viola you are, despite your haughty look and gay attire—hear me one moment for the sake of your mother, whose life is ebbing fast with grief. Your clothes were found upon the bank of a

stream in the wood; we thought you were drowned, and sought for you in vain. Inspired with one faint hope, I asked for you at the castle; none had seen you, and we mourned you dead. Oh, Viola, I know not how you have become the rich and great lady you now appear. I seek not to learn; but come with me, though but for a moment, to cheer your mother's heart with the truth that you live, though it may be, lost to us forever."

This appeal only excited intense anger in Viola's breast. She saw herself betrayed, cast from her false position, and exposed to the scorn of those she had deceived. Every feeling of duty and affection was crushed beneath the weight of selfishness and pride that filled her heart. Had her mother knelt at her feet, she would have spurned her in that moment of anger and mortification; and thus, with a countenance pale with suppressed emotion, she haughtily exclaimed:

"Will no one release me from these insults?" Then turning with flashing eyes to Constant—

"Unhand me, sir; I know you not!" she said, and striking the horse severely with her riding-whip, the animal sprang forward, and Constant sank upon the ground.

Various and conflicting were the emotions that filled Viola's breast on her homeward ride; but amid

all the anger, mortification, and dread of discovery that raged by turns, there was no place for a single emotion of regret urging her to do her duty. She saw that she was suspected of being an impostor, and as this conviction forced itself upon her, she felt the thorns of the rose-bud she wore, pierce her bosom with redoubled violence.

The adventure gave rise to many conjectures and remarks among the party. Viola attempted to make light of the affair, and declared it a poor compliment to be mistaken for an ignorant country girl.

Upon their arrival at the castle, her consternation was increased by learning that the mistress herself had returned, and was anxious to meet her friends. Viola wished their first interview to be private, and endeavored to reach her apartment unobserved. But the hostess stood upon the castle steps eager to welcome her guests, and to pass unnoticed was impossible.

She had heard from the servants of the haughty and beautiful stranger who was sojourning there, and knew not who it could be that thus honored her.

Unfortunately for Viola, the lady's carriage had been detained in the village for a slight repair, and she had heard of the young girl's mysterious disappearance. She recognized Viola immediately, and

dissembling her surprise, accosted her courteously, asking if she had learned her mother's illness?

At these words Viola saw that farther concealment was impossible, and overcome with conflicting emotions fell to the ground insensible.

Meanwhile the guests related to their hostess what had occurred during the ride, and the lady of the castle, shocked at such heartless falsehood, determined at once to dismiss her guest.

The servants were ordered to bring her baggage from the room she had occupied, and when Viola recovered from her swoon, she found all the company assembled around her, while the servants crowded in the rear, curious to witness the downfall of the insolent stranger.

"Viola," said the lady of the castle, "I have learned with horror of your base conduct and daring imposition. Had you appeared here in your true position, I would have been your firm and faithful friend. Since, however, you have seen proper to impose upon my guests by assuming a rank to which you have no claim, I pronounce you an artful, designing impostor, and dismiss you forever from my roof. How you so suddenly obtained wealth I care not to ask, it is sufficient that you have applied it to the basest uses, deceiving others, and denying those who claim your duty and affection. Go, base, deceitful

girl; these are your possessions, take them and depart."

Humbled, and stung to the soul, Viola turned from the door without a word. A proud reply rose to her lips, but her tongue refused its office. And now the rose-bud in her bosom pierced her with an agonizing sting. Viola impatiently snatched it from her breast and cast it from her, and her eye resting on the rose-tree that stood at her feet, she thrust it aside, exclaiming passionately:

"Cruel and perfidious fairy, take back your dangerous gift, the source of all my suffering and shame."

No sooner had she spoken, than the rose-tree disappeared, together with all the rich dresses it had brought; and Viola, like a second Cinderella, departed in rags and tatters from the castle gates that she had entered in such splendid style but a few days before.

Bewildered and overwhelmed with shame and despair, Viola sped on, scarce knowing whither she went. Her brain reeled, her strength failed, and she at length sunk insensible to the ground.

When Viola again returned to consciousness, she was lying in her own humble chamber. She felt very weak and faint, and it was some minutes before she could recall any thing that had passed. All that

had transpired seemed like a troubled dream; but suddenly her eyes rested on the white rose-tree, that stood green and flourishing on the window seat.

Then Viola realized her past folly, and covered her face in an agony of shame.

Her mother softly approached, and when she saw Viola awake and conscious, tears of joy rained down her face. Viola remembered her wicked conduct, and could not bear to look upon her mother; but the good woman quietly brought the rose-tree to the bedside and said kindly:

"You have talked much about a rose-tree, my child; see, I have taken good care of this; it is strong and healthy, though all the buds have withered and fallen, except these two." As she spoke, Viola saw the two full, pure white buds, nestling in their mossy covering, and just peeping forth amid the bright green leaves. Their fragrant breath floated toward her refreshingly, and then she remembered the promise of the gentle fairy.

With an effort she reached forth her hand, and plucking a bud, placed it in her bosom.

Then there stole over her a quiet sense of happiness and peace. The painful regret with which she remembered the past, was tempered by the hope of forgiveness; and when she heard a gentle tap at the door, and the anxious voice of Constant inquiring

tenderly for her, she asked her mother to bid him enter. And then, with her head pillowed on her mother's arm, and her hand clasped in that of her faithful friend, she told them all the story of the fairies at the fountain—her choice—and the after scenes of folly and pride. She did not conceal the disgrace she had suffered, nor the sinful thoughts that filled her heart. And when she besought their forgiveness, who can doubt that it was freely given?

Then she heard in return, how Constant returned after his cruel repulse, and told her mother all that had passed, and the sick parent arose from her bed, determined to find her daughter, and fathom the mystery—how Constant accompanied her, and they found the object of their search, senseless in the wood. Tenderly they carried her home, and for many days she had raved in high delirium, seeming to live over again the scenes through which she had passed, and very frequently mentioning the stately lady and the red rose-tree.

All this, and more, she heard with penitent tears, while the soft white bud rested like a dove of peace in her bosom, and she was happy.

Viola rose from her bed of sickness an altered being. Her pride and selfishness were gone for ever, and in their stead appeared gentleness, and kindly love to all. It was wonderful how the white moss

bud retained its freshness, showing no symptom of decay, but sending forth each day, a more delicious fragrance. And though the white rose triumphed on the cheek, as well as in the bosom of Viola, to one, at least, she appeared more beautiful, as to all she was more loveable than before.

As soon as her strength returned, Viola carried the now treasured rose-tree to the fairy fountain, and with a lingering gaze of gratitude, plucked the last remaining bud, and cast it on the water, murmuring her wish for a friend.

As the flower floated on the surface, Viola expected to see the gentle lady appear, but a slight rustling of the leaves attracted her, and turning, she beheld Constant.

In his hand was the beautiful rose-tree, now again laden with its fragrant burden; and as he presented it to Viola, Constant spoke gently:

"Let me be your truest friend, Viola; the past shall be forgotten, and we will yet be happy."

Viola looked up with an answering smile; then plucking two buds, she gave one to her companion, and placing the other in her bosom, said earnestly:

"I only wish to prove worthy of your kindness and esteem."

Constant pressed the hand extended to him, and

putting the bud in his breast, a sense of perfect happiness filled the heart of each.

But Viola, as she bent over the fountain to hide the emotion that swelled in her heart, saw far away in the clear, bright depths of the silver water, a sweet face smiling back upon her own, and she knew it was her guardian spirit, the gentle fairy of the pure White Rose.

"But the story is not finished," cried little Lily, as Aunt Elsie ceased.

"I have read all that is therein written," replied the kind old lady, with a smile. "Viola has renounced her folly and chosen the better part; what better ending can you desire?"

"Oh," exclaimed Norah Graham, "it ought to tell how she married Constant, and lived in the little white cottage, and was happy all the days of her life."

"And how the white rose-tree was always in blossom, and never failed her," added Jessie Lester.

"And that the moss buds never bore a thorn," said her sister May.

"It might have told that the first use she made of her magical tree, was to contribute to her mother's happiness," remarked Mary Parker.

"And that she never again saw the false fairy of

the red rose, and never was proud any more," chimed in little Lily.

"Really, my little people," replied Aunt Elsie, laughing at their earnestness, "you have finished the story for yourselves, much better than I could have done for you. And now, can you tell me what the two fairies represent?"

"The Red Rose fairy was Pride," said Grace, "and the thorns on the buds, the sting that foolish, vain pride always inflicts."

"And the White Rose is Humility," added Clara, "and its sweet fragrance is gentleness and modesty."

"And *I* am Viola," interrupted Bertha, sobbing on Aunt Elsie's bosom, "for I too have cast aside pride and chosen humility. Oh, Aunt Elsie, I ask *your* forgiveness for endeavoring to deceive you; and yours," she added, turning to her companions, "for my foolish vanity in trying to outshine you last night. I never passed a more miserable evening, and its remembrance will always prevent me wearing the red rose of pride, since I have experienced the sting of its thorns."

CHAPTER VIII.

At the close of a short, bright winter day, the young people assembled once more in the cheerful parlor. Never had that pleasant old room worn a more comfortable and home-like appearance than now, in the thick-coming shadows of night.

The lights had not been brought, and the fitful flame from the great hickory logs flung grotesque shadows on the walls, and illuminated the old family portraits, seeming to warm their faded countenances into a genial smile. The glass doors of the old bookcase gleamed invitingly in the fire-light; and even the colorless groups of flowers on the well-worn screens, grew brighter and fresher in that ruddy glow.

The young party were clustered in groups on the sofas, and Lily as usual with her head on Aunt Elsie's knee, while the old lady fondly put back the golden curls from the child's brow, and looked tenderly and thoughtfully upon her cloudless face.

Within all was light and warmth—without, intense cold. It was one of those bright, still nights when the very moonbeams seem to freeze you beneath their cold unvarying light. Long icicles hung from the leafless boughs and the low eaves, while for miles around the country presented one vast unbroken tract of snow. A few clouds crept slowly athwart the sky, as though they too felt the benumbing influence of the freezing weight they bore, and sometimes passed before the moon as if to gather warmth from her rays; but she only tinged them with her pale cold light, and watched them unmoved as they wearily journeyed on, while the countless stars far away twinkled and sparkled merrily like so many tiny silver spangles on the dark blue sky.

One stray moonbeam peeped in through the window, and fell like a silver arrow on the floor of the old parlor; but it did not mingle its pale cold light with the warm, ruddy glow of the crackling flame; there was no congeniality between them; and while the flickering fire-light went leaping and frolicking over floor and furniture like a playful child, kissing a fresh cheek until it burned with the ardent salute, forming tall giants from the shadows of unconscious china jars, and painting droll profiles on the wall, in all the uproarious merriment of good-natured warmth; the pale moonbeam rested motionless and

cold where first it fell. It seemed like a fair, proud beauty, chilling in her very loveliness, and was as much out of place in that cozy, heart-warming dear old parlor, with that group of joyous mirth-loving childhood, as any stately beauty would have been.

The children were engaged in the game of "What are my thoughts like;" and much ingenuity was displayed in their comparisons. All save one united in the amusement—little Frank Field sat alone in the window seat, and silently looked out upon the sky.

Presently Norah Graham came softly, and peeping over his shoulder, exclaimed:

"Frank is watching the moon playing hide and go seek with the stars."

"Then his thoughts are like moonshine," cried Ernest.

Frank looked up, and smiled as he said:

"I was looking at that large cloud; see how exactly it has taken the appearance of a great castle; there are the turrets complete, with the moon just rising above them.

"That is just like you, Frank, always building castles in the air," replied Lucy Parker, who now joined them; "take care lest they come tumbling about your ears some day.

But Frank still looked thoughtfully out upon the sky, as he said musingly:

"I like best to watch the clouds at sunset; sometimes they seem like great armies meeting, or large masses of rock rolling together; and often they fall like a purple canopy fringed with gold above a kingly throne."

"And then you imagine yourself a king upon the throne, I suppose," added Lucy Parker, with a laugh.

"Sometimes," replied Frank, quietly.

"The imagination is better than the reality, I think," added Harry Wilder; "for my part, I should not like to be a king."

"Nor I," answered Frank, musingly; "though I should like to become great and famous when I grow a man."

"That I hope and trust you will be," now spoke Aunt Elsie; "great in all good works, and build a true and never-dying fame in the hearts of all who love you. It was a favorite remark of a friend," she continued, "that a peasant sitting in his chimney corner and imagining himself a king, was really happier than the sovereign himself. Imagination is a wonderful power, and does much towards investing life with new beauty, or enveloping it in gloom. It is very wrong to indulge it to excess, and you, my dear Frank, particularly, should keep yours in check, lest

it run away with your reason, and so unfit you for the duties of life."

"Harry often calls me a day-dreamer," replied Frank, "but I do not exactly understand him."

Aunt Elsie answered:

"I suspect he means that you sometimes drink too deeply of the Diamond Fountain, as the boy did, who was lost in the woods."

"Now we shall have another story," cried little Lily, starting up. "Dear Aunt Elsie, shall I bring the lights?"

"No," replied the old lady; "I shall need no other light than the cheerful glow that falls on these happy faces. My story is a very short one, and I can relate it from memory; it is called

The Diamond Fountain.

In a large forest, far away from all the habitations of men, there lived an old hermit, with one little boy named Rolph.

The hermit had not passed all his days in solitude; he had spent many years amid the bustle of life, but weariness and disappointment fell upon him, and he turned away from the ceaseless strivings

of mankind, to seek repose in the silent, peaceful woods.

Rolph had been carefully instructed by the hermit in many useful things, and was generally contented and happy. But sometimes he felt very lonely without a companion, and often walked amid the tall old trees, listening to the voice of the wind among the leaves, and thinking it spoke to him in an unknown tongue.

The hermit sometimes whiled away the long winter nights, in tales of the wonderful things he had seen in the large cities where he once had lived; and as Rolph listened eagerly, he conceived a strong desire to visit the great world that spread beyond the limits of his forest home, and to enjoy these wonderful sights himself.

This idea gained strength every day. Sometimes he thought he would find his way out of the woods before the hermit missed him, but he could not bear to leave his kind protector in this ungrateful manner, and so pined away in fruitless dreams of the bright and gay world, that seemed like a vision of fairy land to his imagination.

The hermit saw what was passing in the boy's mind, and endeavored to uproot the longings he had unwittingly sown.

He told Rolph how much wickedness and deceit

dwelt in the world; and said that even the fairest flowers there, bore thorns, and the most delightful pleasures left a sting behind. He painted life and the world in the darkest colors of disappointment and distrust; but Rolph's ardent fancy decked even this picture with sunshine, and he still desired to see and judge for himself.

When the hermit found the boy so eager to depart, he gave, at last, a reluctant permission; but he warned him that the way through the forest was long and gloomy, and said that his courage would fail in that lonely and dismal journey.

But Rolph would listen to no discouraging fears. He was happy in having obtained permision to depart, and so set out on his journey with a joyous heart.

The hermit accompanied him some distance, until they came to the thickest part of the wood, then giving Rolph a small flask, he bade him fill it at a certain fountain, which he directed him where to find. The water, he said, was pleasant to the taste, and possessed many valuable qualities.

If drank sparingly it would lend a brightness to his path, and invest the objects about him with new and peculiar beauty. But if indulged in to excess, would bewilder and mislead him.

He warned him, also, not to drink of the waters

unless they appeared clear and sparkling; sometimes they were discolored, and then their effect would be to envelope his pathway in still deeper gloom.

After giving Rolph many charges, and much good advice, he left him, and the boy journeyed on alone.

He had not proceeded far before he heard the pleasant sound of falling water, and hastening forward, beheld a beautiful fountain, whose bright waters fell in diamond showers upon the grass.

Flowers of rich and varied hues grew upon its brink, and wherever a drop of the sparkling spray fell, there sprang up an exquisite blossom, while gorgeous and ever varying rainbows spanned the crystal water, that constantly showered its wealth of diamond moisture upon the luxuriant turf.

This was the Diamond Fountain of which the hermit had told him, and Rolph hastened to fill his flask, and then took a long draught of the delicious water.

No sooner had he done so, than every thing about him appeared invested with new beauty. He saw flowers where none had been before, and heard the sweet singing of birds, whose melody had been hitherto unheeded, while the sun himself seemed to shine with increased glory.

Rolph's heart beat lightly—his path seemed clear before him, and flowers sprang up at every step. He even fancied he could see the tall spires of a great

city far in the distance, and was sure that he should encounter no obstacles in his way.

Filled with an exhilarating sense of happiness, he wandered on, drinking frequently of the inspiring water, until he emptied his flask.

Inwardly condemning the hermit for giving him so small a flask, he retraced his steps to the Diamond Fountain, eager to refill his empty flagon.

He reached the Diamond water, and throwing himself upon the turf at its side, drank deeply of the inspiring draught, careless and forgetful of the hermit's warning admonition.

Soon a languor and inertness stole over him; he felt unable, as unwilling, to move from the spot, but surrendered himself entirely to the delight of quaffing the intoxicating water, and enjoying the bright visions that it appeared to create.

Thus time wore on—day faded into twilight—the rainbows no more spanned the sparkling waters; night folded her mantle of shadows over all the earth, and still Rolph lay in dreamy unconsciousness by the side of the Diamond Fountain.

Morning dawned, gloomy and cheerless, and Rolph rousing himself from his listlessness, gazed about him bewildered and confused. How altered was the scene! The fountain indeed remained, but its waters no longer sparkled and flashed like gems, calling

fresh beauty into being at every drop that fell. They looked dark and discolored in the leaden hue of the clouded, threatening sky, and the flowers upon its brink were withered and scentless. Rolph, though startled at the change, thought not in his bewilderment of the hermit's warning; he eagerly quaffed the no longer sparkling fountain, thinking that its influence would beautify the scene about him.

As his lips touched the water, he started up in affright; it was inexpressibly bitter and disagreeable.

And now as Rolph gazed tremblingly around, the bright visions that had delighted him, were vanished. He could no longer distinguish the pathway before him;—about and beyond spread impenetrable darkness and gloom. With a cry of anguish, the unhappy Rolph sprang forward and was lost in the darkness.

But he reached not the great city, neither did the hermit ever see him more.

"I should think the fountain might have been filled with wine, to judge by its effects," remarked George, as Aunt Elsie ceased.

"Your comparison is not inapt," replied the old lady, "for imagination, like wine, gladdens the heart of man; but if indulged in to excess, often leads to

inevitable ruin. An indulgence in the vague dreams of imagination, certainly unfits us for all life's higher duties, and makes the brightest reality seem dull and insipid. While a morbid, desponding imagination, uch as the Diamond Fountain represents beneath a clouded sky, adds new gloom to every trial, and deepens the shadows that ever fall upon the path of life."

"I think I understand you," answered Frank, thoughtfully; "you mean that it is sinful to waste time in vague dreamings that should be devoted to active improvement, and I shall endeavor to profit by Rolph's example."

"I wonder," said little Lily, musingly, "why it is, that all Aunt Elsie's stories seem written on purpose for us. I wish we could hear all the stories in that old portfolio; I am sure there is one for each."

"Wait until the midsummer holidays, Lily, and then perhaps your wish may be granted," replied Aunt Elsie, smiling. "There are many more stories in the old portfolio, that I hope to read you when we all assemble together once more."

"Oh, that will be delightful," cried Clara; "we will rest upon that promise until we all meet again."

"What a short vacation this has been," said Norah, with a heavy sigh.

"Quite as long as usual," replied Charles Carol;

"but the time has appeared short, because it has passed so pleasantly. I have often noticed how much longer school hours seem than any others."

"I wish I had a copy of Aunt Elsie's stories, which I shrewdly suspect were written on purpose for us, as Lily says," remarked George.

"I think," answered Bertha, "it is because we each wear a Wonderful Watch, that we so readily apply Aunt Elsie's stories to ourselves."

"You have discovered the true secret, Bertha," said Aunt Elsie. "I doubt not that there are many little people, to whom these stories would apply with equal force; and I shall be content if the old portfolio has sent forth one good spirit, whose influence may hereafter warn, or guide you on the path to happiness."

Dinah now appeared at the door with lights, and after the shutters were closed in, and the pale cold moonbeam shut out, the children clustered in groups about the table, and the old parlor wore again its look of cheerful coziness.

After tea, a few young friends from the neighborhood came in, and a hearty game of "blind man's buff," concluded the evening's amusement.

CHAPTER IX.

The holidays were now fast drawing to a close, and only two days remained of the long and delightful vacation. One of these was devoted to the momentous business of packing up wardrobes, and making all the necessary preparations for departure, after a long visit.

There was a great deal of bustle among the young guests, and much searching after mislaid books and truant drawing pencils, with many inquiries for missing tops, and mysterious balls, that seemed to vanish just when most sought after. Numerous stray ribbons and forgotten toys, now returned to their respective owners, and wrapping paper was in great demand.

It was a very busy and important day for the little people, and they all felt tired and weary when, their arrangements being all completed, they once more assembled in the old parlor.

There was a shade of sadness on each young face, as they thought of the coming separation, and dear Aunt Elsie, too, looked graver than usual, as her gaze rested fondly on the bright circle which surrounded her, and she thought how soon its links would be severed, perhaps never to unite again.

To-morrow was to be the last day, and even to young, gay hearts, that single word "the last," has much of sorrow. The kind Aunt Elsie was unwilling that the long holiday should end in gloom, and so had made preparations for a juvenile festival, that was to deck even the parting hour with joyousness, as the glowing sunset sheds a brightness on the day's farewell.

The party was to take place on the following evening; and all the young people for miles around had been invited to share the festivities.

The children were more silent than usual, and Aunt Elsie, rousing herself from a reverie, said:

"You are very quiet to-night, my little people; are you wearied with your day's employment?"

"I think I may answer that we all feel a little tired," replied Jessie Lester, "and a little sad beside."

"Yes, indeed," added Lily, "very sad, and very sorry to leave you, dear Aunt Elsie."

"But it will not do to feel sad, Lily, on the last

quiet evening that we shall pass together for very many months," answered Aunt Elsie, kindly smiling, "so let us send sadness to the winds while we indulge in a social chat. And first, are all your preparations completed, and is there nothing mislaid or forgotten?"

"Every thing is done, I believe," replied Clara, who, with Bertha and Grace, had superintended the arrangements of the younger guests.

"And only think, Aunt Elsie, none of us have lost a single thing," exclaimed Norah Graham, eagerly; "don't we deserve credit for being so careful?"

"I think you do, my dear," said the old lady, cheerfully; "and to judge by the shouts of laughter, that penetrated even to the kitchen, I am pretty certain that none of you lost your magical key, even for a moment."

"A magical key! what does that mean?" cried several voices.

"It must mean a trunk key," cried Ernest, "for I am very sure I should not have laughed had I lost mine."

"No," said Aunt Elsie, laughing, as she shook her head, "that is not it at all, Ernest; you must guess again."

"I cannot guess what the magical key is, but I

think I know where to find it," whispered little Lily over the back of Aunt Elsie's chair.

"May I get the old portfolio, and let you see if it is there, Aunt Elsie?"

"Oh, yes," cried Ernest, who had overheard Lily's request; "please, Aunt Elsie, read us one more story as a farewell."

His request was warmly seconded by the little group, and Aunt Elsie premising that the story was but a short one, and bidding her auditors listen attentively, as she should expect the explanation from them, drew a small stand near her, and read the story of

The Magical Key.

Little Eva was a merry, happy-hearted child, who did nothing but dance aud sing from morning until night. She was quite young, and unable to give much assistance to her mother, who was but a poor woman, and lived in a rude little cottage just off from the road.

Eva was very willing to do all that she could, to be sure, but that was very little; and as she saw her mother toiling all day, she often wondered when she should get old enough to assist her.

It chanced one morning, as she started very early to get a little milk for breakfast, that she espied something bright, shining in the grass. She hastily picked it up, and saw that it was a small golden key, curiously wrought. Delighted with her prize, she ran home to her mother. The good woman esteemed the finding of the key as a lucky omen, and carefully hung it about Eva's neck, charging her never to part with it.

From that day, Eva never removed the key from its resting place in her bosom. She was always cheerful and contented, there was but one thing that preyed upon her mind. She frequently heard her mother wish for happiness, and in her childish simplicity revolved a thousand ways by which to attain this coveted good.

One very cold day, as she sped over the frozen ground with her threadbare cloak, and well-worn shoes, that scarce served to keep her little feet from the snow, she saw a very old woman sitting wearily by the wayside, with her head bowed down on her clasped hands. She was poorly clad, and seemed very feeble.

Eva felt sorry for the poor old woman, and approaching her, said softly:

"What is the matter, dame? can I help you?"

The poor old woman looked up, when the child spoke.

"I am very weary," she answered, feebly, "and have a long way to go; but I cannot walk alone, I am not able."

"I will go with you," said Eva, quickly; "you do not look very heavy, and I think I can support you if you lean on me. Though I am little, I am pretty strong."

"You are a good child," replied the old woman, as with Eva's assistance she rose from her seat on the bank;" but I walk so slowly, you will perish with the cold."

"Oh, never mind me," said the little girl, cheerfully; "I am used to the cold, and can spare you my cloak too, good dame, for you need a warmer covering."

So saying, she threw her own scanty mantle upon the aged stranger's shoulders, and carefully assisted her feeble steps as she tottered over the frozen ground.

As they went on, Eva told the simple story of her mother's poverty, and her own eagerness to assist her. The old woman listened attentively, and after they had walked some distance, she complained of fatigue, and sat down upon a bank to rest.

As Eva placed herself at her feet, the aged dame

drew from beneath her faded cloak a small casket, which she handed to Eva, saying:

"You deserve a reward for your kindness, and this is all I have to give; there are some things in this casket that may be useful to you, if you are ever fortunate enough to find a key to fit it."

Eva was unwilling to take the box, but the old woman pressed it upon her; and when the little girl found that she was resolute in desiring her to accept it, she remembered her golden key, and hastened to try if it would fit the lock.

No sooner had she turned the key, than the lid of the casket flew open, and she beheld within, a small mirror, a slender staff, a leathern belt curiously inwrought, and a silver lamp of dazzling brightness.

Eva did not know the use of these things, but was delighted with their novelty. She looked up to thank the old woman, and beheld in her stead, a beautiful lady.

She uttered an exclamation of surprise, but the beautiful lady smiled kindly, and said:

"You behold me now in my true form, Eva, and as you have proved yourself worthy, I desire to benefit you. Wish what you will, it shall be granted."

Eva would probably have felt embarrassed at this address, had not the recollection of her mother's wish

for happiness been ever present to her mind. She therefore answered:

"I wish to find happiness."

"Happiness," replied the strange lady, with a bright smile, "dwells in the castle of peace; you are on the road to her dwelling now, but will have many difficulties to surmount ere you reach it. It is a long and dangerous journey. Do you feel able to undertake it?"

"I am able and willing to do any thing to procure the happiness for which my mother constantly sighs," answered Eva.

"Well, then, listen to me," said the lady. "The key which you wear will unlock the enchanted castle gate where happiness dwells, as readily as it did this casket; and I may tell you, that without that key these gifts would have been of little value to you; now they are inestimable."

So saying, she took the leathern belt, and hanging the mirror upon it, clasped it about Eva's waist, and said:

"While you wear this girdle, you will be endowed with strength to fulfil your undertaking; and whenever you are in doubt which way to go, look in this mirror, it will point out your path."

She then gave Eva the lamp, and placing the staff in her hand, continued:

"This staff will support your steps when weary, and the lamp will light your path. Go onward, and do not fear the enemies who will present themselves; armed as you are, you can overcome them all. When you reach the castle its gates will open at the touch of your key, and happiness then reward you for all you have undergone."

Little Eva felt awed at the importance and novelty of her position; she bent her eyes upon the ground, and when she raised them, the lady had disappeared.

Eva looked upon her precious gifts, and went resolutely forward. She felt strong, and able to perform the task.

The way was very desolate, the snow laid deep upon the path, and the leafless branches sighed in the wind. Still Eva toiled patiently on, through the drifted snow-banks, and over the frozen brooks. She had but one thought, to reach the castle of happiness and obtain her gifts for her mother.

The little girl came at length to a point from which two roads diverged. One appeared decked in the beauty and foliage of summer, the other was bleak and dreary. At the entrance of the beautiful path stood a graceful youth who invited Eva to take that road, saying it was the shortest way to the castle of happiness. Eva hesitated an instant, then re-

membering the beautiful lady's injunction, looked into the mirror, and beheld the dreary road reflected there; at the same time she saw that the pleasant path was filled with snares and pitfalls, while the youth's features appeared hideous and distorted. Eva turned unhesitatingly into the dreary path, and swiftly sped along.

As she went, the way seemed dark before her, and then her silver lamp emitted a brilliant light that cheered her weary steps.

Many were the obstacles she had to encounter. She was stopped on her way by a large gate, at which stood a dark man, who demanded toll; but Eva applied her magical key to the lock, and it flew open before her.

Often she was beset by forms, who whispered her of the terrible difficulties she would meet upon her path, but she leaned firmly upon her staff, and as she saw the silver beam from the lamp she bore, shining far before her, she went on cheered and comforted.

Many were the snares she escaped by consulting her faithful mirror, and the difficulties she overcame by leaning upon her staff, while the belt she wore endued her with fresh vigor, and the magical key opened every gate before her.

At length she was rewarded by seeing the turrets

of the castle rising before her, and with a cry of joy she sprang forward and stood upon the threshold.

She found herself surrounded by a noisy group, each one offering to procure her ingress to the castle but Eva remembered that her precious gifts had brought her safely through many trials, and she needed no other assistanee now.

With an eager, trembling hand, she applied her golden key—the gates flew open, and in a moment she found herself within the court of the castle, and clasped in the arms of the beautiful stranger.

Need it be told that one so firm and faithful in the search after happiness, was equally just and generous in dispensing her gifts when obtained, and that ever after, Eva dwelt with her mother in the valley of peace, and was known as the favorite child of Happiness.

Aunt Elsie elosed the manuscript, and looked inquiringly around.

"And now I want your explanation of my little story," she said.

"I think the mirror which Eva possessed must have been Truth," said May Lester, as Aunt Elsie's glance rested upon her.

"And the form that tempted her into another path was, perhaps, Falsehood," added her sister Jessie.

"Eva's staff was Faith, of course," continued Grace, "as it supported her through all her trials."

"I thought the lamp represented Faith," said Mary Parker, "but the staff is more appropriate; the lamp then must be Hope, that shed a light over her path, and so enabled her to persevere, despite the Fears that endeavored to discourage her. Is it not so, Aunt Elsie?"

Aunt Elsie assented.

"You have defined it very well thus far," she said, "but all is not explained yet."

"No," cried Willie Graham, "we have not yet discovered what the magical key was."

"Let me see," said Harry Wilder, in his droll way; "we have seen Eva fairly started on the road to Happiness with the mirror of Truth, the staff of Faith, and lamp of Hope, to assist her; what other gifts did the fairy give her? Oh, I remember, an embroidered belt; what could that have been?"

"Endurance, perhaps," suggested George.

"Or rather Perseverance, which seems a more active quality," added Frank.

"Very likely," cried Lucy Parker, "for you know patience and perseverance conquer all obstacles. I

have written that copy so often, that I begin to believe it is true."

"I have been thinking who the dark man at the gate could be, but I cannot make it out," said Charles Carrol.

"Perhaps it was Ill Humor," suggested Clara.

"And the crowd at the palace gates were Strifes, Envyings, and Pride," added Bertha, with an appealing look towards Aunt Elsie.

The old lady smiled, and said:

"All very right thus far; and now for the magical key, that so materially influenced Eva's fortune."

"The magical key!" cried Norah; "what could it have been?"

"I have it!" exclaimed Ernest, exultingly; "I have found it; the magical key was Good Tem per."

"You have found it, indeed," said Aunt Elsie, approvingly; "and as you possess it beside, Ernest, I hope you will remember and prize its valuable qualities."

"Nobody has told who the fairy means," chimed in little Lily; "but I know,—it is Aunt Elsie her self."

"Not exactly, my dear," replied Aunt Elsie, kindly; "because I have not the power to endow you

with the precious gifts that Eva possessed. I can only pray that the Giver of all good may bestow them upon you; and shall be happy if through me you have learned one truth, which may assist you to wall securely in the path that alone leads to peace in this present life, and happiness hereafter.

CHAPTER X.

The morning of the last holiday dawned bright and clear, and the little folks were up betimes, and soon busily engaged in preparations for the evening.

Each had her peculiar duty assigned her; the elder girls assisted in preparing the refreshments and arranging the room, while the younger ones felt very important, cutting motto papers and polishing lady apples, until their ripe red cheeks rivalled their own.

The boys, under the superintendence of Harry Wilder, were engaged in decorating a small room off the parlor, with Christmas greens.

This little apartment was Aunt Elsie's private sitting room, but on this occasion was to be thrown open for the accommodation of the juvenile guests. The preparations were completed at an early hour, and the young people retired to rest a little while, before dressing for the evening.

After all had gone up stairs except Bertha and Harry Wilder, who remained with Aunt Elsie, Harry assisted by the willing Dinah, carried an immense green branch into the little room which the boys had decorated, and propped it firmly upon a low platform that had been erected in the centre of the apartment. Aunt Elsie and Bertha remained within some time, and then Aunt Elsie left the room for a moment, and Bertha swiftly running up stairs, returned with a parcel carried very carefully, which she placed in the apartment, and then locking the door, hastened up stairs to join her companions.

Aunt Elsie had requested the young people to assemble in the parlor, an hour before the expected arrival of their guests, and accordingly at the stated time the happy group entered the room, and were received by Aunt Elsie herself.

What a pleasant picture it was; the comfortable parlor with its quaint old-fashioned furniture now polished into more than ordinary lustre, so brilliantly illuminated by groups of tall wax candles, disposed tastefully about the room in candlesticks entwined with evergreens, and the light falling brightly on the fair young faces and graceful forms that clustered about Aunt Elsie.

The dear old lady was a picture by herself, in her

stately dress of rich black satin; the plain lace cap, with the border clinging closely about her benevolent and still handsome face; and the fine, clear muslin kerchief, whose fleecy folds peeped above the neck of her dress, and were confined at the throat by a brooch of jet.

After the little folks had all passed in review before Aunt Elsie, and received many kind words of commendation, she made a sign to Harry Wilder, who threw open the door leading to the small room, and with a cry of surprised delight, the children sprang forward.

A brilliant and unexpected sight burst upon them. The ingenuity of the boys had converted the little room into a perfect bower of Christmas greens, and tapers had been arranged among the branches so as to cast a bright radiance throughout the apartment. In the centre of the room, upon a raised platform, stood a tall Christmas tree, the branches of which were laden with gifts for each member of the party.

The presents were very tastefully arranged by Bertha Carrol, to whom Aunt Elsie had confided the secret; and very beautiful the tree appeared, bowed down beneath the weight of affectionate tributes that it bore.

There was a label on each bough, with the name

of the one for whom the gifts were intended. The lower branches held those of the smaller children, that they might have the pleasure of plucking this curious fruit themselves, and it was pleasant to mark the joy that lighted each young face as they successively carried away some coveted or beautiful article.

The gifts were all distributed at last amid exclamations of delight, when Bertha Carrol, who presided as mistress of the ceremonies, said:

"Here is one bough yet unclaimed, the very topmost of all; it must be for you, Aunt Elsie, since we are all supplied. Will you please look if it bears your name?"

Aunt Elsie good-naturedly stepped upon the platform and read the label. There, sure enough, was written in delicate characters,

"For our dear Aunt Elsie."

The old lady smilingly relieved the bough of its burden, and received in her hands an elegantly woven basket filled with testimonials of affection from each of her young guests.

There was a gold pencil case, a pair of embroidered slippers, knit woollen wristlets, lamp mats, an embroidered spectacle case, containing a pair of gold spectacles, with her name engraved thereon, and many other articles equally tasteful and appropriate.

And while Aunt Elsie gratified the little people by praising each article in turn, they insisted upon her guessing who had made the several gifts, and were delighted at her inability to distinguish the donors.

The hour passed rapidly away, and now the invited guests arrived. The rooms were soon filled with happy groups, and the sports of the evening commenced in earnest.

There was much merriment, and many hearty bursts of laughter as the children entered with eagerness into the old-fashioned games, so productive of harmless mirth. There was dancing too, and Aunt Elsie herself led off the cheerful country dance, to the no small delight of the young party.

But amid all the unrestrained joyousness of the evening, nothing like rudeness occurred to mar its harmony. Aunt Elsie moved about with cheerful, quiet kindness, seeing that all were equally happy, and Dinah's smiling face was constantly seen among the guests, as she tendered the refreshments, and evidently enjoyed the glad scene about her.

The festivities were prolonged until a late hour, when the invited guests dispersed to their own homes; and after the last good-night kiss had been pressed upon the brows of her own little people, Aunt Elsie looked

about the now deserted room with a sigh of regret, as she thought how many months must elapse ere again it would be enlivened by her beloved group of FIRESIDE FAIRIES.

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